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**Leibniz's Cosmology: Transcendental Rationalism and Kabbalistic Symbolism**

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a special investigation of Leibniz's cosmology as it can be determined both from his writings and by means of a comparison of it with the mystical philosophy of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. The chief protagonists of this latter were Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Francis Mercury van Helmont and Anne Conway. They will be discussed, along with Leibniz's acquaintance with them and his involvement in the kabbalistic text *Thoughts on Genesis*. The comparison, which includes examinations of Leibniz's critical remarks on their writings, as well as his work on *Thoughts on Genesis*, highlights Christian Platonic elements in Leibniz (which are often overlooked) and seeks to yield an improved interpretation of his cosmology, free of the apparent paradoxes and vacillations that some other interpretations have been prone to attribute to him. It is argued that certain consequences are implied by Leibnizian principles, some of which he sought to obscure on account of their latent unorthodoxy, and others which he seems not to have fully been aware of. The comparison shows that the two doctrines are actually rather close on account of their shared Platonic principles. This should not be taken as evidence that Leibniz was influenced by the kabbalists, for these principles were established in his philosophy before he had any significant contact with them. However, there is evidence that Leibniz may have adopted some of their metaphors. In this thesis Leibniz's interest in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah is interpreted in terms of his greater goal to effect social peace, an aspiration shared by them too. This goal was to be realized by harmonizing the different religious traditions through the common base of his own metaphysics: Leibniz wanted to see whether the exoteric writings of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah could be grounded in his rational metaphysics. The thesis proposes that the proximity of these two doctrines is such that Christian Lurianic Kabbalah can be regarded, in many ways, as a mystical exoteric parallel to Leibniz's.

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Tavistock, Devon  
June, 2003

## Bibliographic Abbreviations

### Primary Texts

- A *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Samtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. by Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923-)
- AG *G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989)
- B "Leibniz on Wachter's *Elucidarius cabalisticus*: A Critical Edition of the so-called 'Réfutation de Spinoza'", ed. by Philip Beeley, *The Leibniz Review*, 12 (2002), 1-15
- D *G.G. Leibnitii Opera Omnia*, ed. by L.L. Dutens, 6 vols (Geneva: De Tournes, 1769) (repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1989)
- FoL *Leibniz: La Philosophie Juive et la Cabale*, ed. by A. Foucher de Careil (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1861)
- GP *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Leibniz*, ed. by C.I. Gerhardt, 7 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875-90) (repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1965)
- Gr *G.W. Leibniz: Textes inédits*, ed. by Gaston Grua, 2 vols (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1948)
- H *Theodicy*, tr. by E.M. Huggard (Illinois: Open Court, 1985)
- L *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. by Leroy Loemker, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969)
- Pe "Tagebuch", ed. by G.H. Pertz, in *Geschichtliche Aufsätze und Gedichte Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Gesammeltewerk* (Hannover: 1847)
- Pk *G.W. Leibniz: De Summa Rerum, Metaphysical Papers, 1675-76*, ed. by G.H.R. Parkinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)
- RB *G.W. Leibniz: New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)
- RC *G.W. Leibniz: Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*, tr. by H. Rosemont and D. Cook, Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, 4 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977)
- Wn *Leibniz: Selections*, ed. by Philip Wiener (New York: Scribner's, 1951)

### Manuscripts

- L Br Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hannover, MSS Helmont
- LH Leibniz Handschriften, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hannover
- RJ G.W. Leibniz, Reise-Journal 1687-88 (Faksimiledruck iter Handschrift XLI) (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966)

## Secondary Texts

- OH Orio de Miguel, B., *Leibniz y el Pensamiento Hermético*, Collección Leibnizius Politechnicus 3, 2 vols (Valencia, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2002)
- OK ----- "Leibniz y la Tradición Theosofico-Kabbalistica: Francisco Mercurio van Helmont", 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Madrid, 1993)

## Note on Translations

Translations are referred to the primary texts. Where I have quoted a translation from a secondary text, I have cited this followed by the primary source after a semi-colon. Otherwise, it is to be assumed that the translations are my own. The original language is only quoted where terms or meanings are critical, ambiguous or not published.

The numerous quotations from the Latin draft notes for *Thoughts on Genesis* are referred to the recently published OH followed by the manuscript source. All these passages are my own translations.



## Introduction

Leibniz was born towards the end of the Thirty Years War, the horrors of which epitomized the reality of social and political upheaval that had been brought about by the disintegration of religious authority during the periods of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. It is probably true to say that, from an early age, Leibniz felt it was to be his life's work to try to make the world a better place by working to rid it of social and political conflict. This would take the form of both diplomacy and the use of his intellect in the service of philosophy. To this end he sought to establish a single true metaphysics which would end intellectual disputes once and for all, and which would serve as the intellectual basis from which religious disputes would themselves be cleared up. With metaphysical and theological doctrines then unified and harmonized, the restored authority of reason and spirit would translate itself into political and social harmony.<sup>1</sup>

Leibniz sought to establish his single true metaphysics not by showing that the major philosophies were actually wrong in themselves, but, rather, that each of them possessed some *fragment* of the truth, which was fully enshrined in the underlying metaphysics and which, therefore, would unite these seemingly disparate doctrines and end intellectual disputes. Leibniz set out to do this, not by claiming that all prior doctrines were false, and to be superceded only by his new one, but by *extracting* from those existing doctrines a truth that had been there all along. His method, then, was not revolutionary but eclectic.

Christia Mercer has argued, convincingly in my opinion, that the truth Leibniz was

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<sup>1</sup> See Stuart Brown, *Leibniz* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 2-3; and Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 2-3, 9.

trying to get at was that which lay behind the doctrines of Plato, Aristotle and their followers, and in doing this he was following in the tradition of the Renaissance Eclectics.<sup>2</sup> Renaissance eclecticism had its origin in the intellectual excitement that had accompanied the re-emergence, and Latin translation by Ficino, of certain texts which had been lost to Europe during the Dark Ages: the writings of Pythagoras, Plato, the neo-Platonic School, the *Hermetic* texts, and others. It was believed that these texts, including kabbalistic ones, contained fragments of a wisdom known as the *Prisca Theologia*: truths revealed to Moses which had not been written down in Scripture but which had found their way into the ancient philosophical writings. Possessed of this belief, Pico della Mirandola, Guillaume Postel, Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella, and others, set about piecing together an eclectic synthesis of the fragments of the *Prisca Theologia* scattered throughout Ficino's texts. Believing that they possessed the single and indisputably true theological doctrine, these eclectics, claiming that the doctrine was the Christian one, set out to show how all people should believe in this one religion, the outcome of which would be the end of social discord.<sup>3</sup>

Leibniz did not believe in the *Prisca Theologia* premise that there existed a body of revealed truth outside of Scripture. But he did see in the ancient texts the existence of unquestionable truths, which had also been carried over into the re-workings and elaborations of the Renaissance Eclectics. He shared with the latter the desire to effect worldwide religious harmony through a single underlying true doctrine that had not to contradict the Christian message. Whether his motive for this condition was the result of his faith (that Christian doctrine *was* the primary indubitable truth) or the result of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-59.

<sup>3</sup> See D.P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1972); Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).



his pragmatism (that the establishment of a universal religion was most likely to be affected from the base of Europe's already established religion) is a question that lies outside the scope of this thesis.

Out of the various doctrines of Pythagoras, Plato, the Neo-Platonists, Aristotle and the Renaissance Eclectics, Leibniz extracted what he discerned to be an underlying body of truths, and this he sought to enshrine in his metaphysical doctrine. This was to be thoroughly rational and would be purged of whatever in the older texts he deemed to be unfounded, particularly the occult elaborations of certain of the Renaissance writers. Leibniz hoped that his metaphysical doctrine would serve as the common philosophical foundation from which all the differences of the various religions might be overcome. This perceived unification was to go beyond the immediate ecumenicalist goal of reconciling Catholics and Protestants, but would extend to all other religions and sects; for example, Judaism, Islam, and the Chinese religion. The bounds of this religious harmonizing would therefore spread beyond Europe until all the peoples of the world believed in either the same religion or realized that what differences there were were only differences of expression of one common underlying body of truth.<sup>4</sup> Leibniz's programme for religious harmony endured throughout his career, from its application to the Catholic-Protestant schism in his *Catholic Demonstrations* of 1668, up to its application to the philosophy of the Chinese in 1715-16.

Insofar as the body of metaphysical truth was to *underlie* the various religious

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<sup>4</sup> See Daniel Cook, "Leibniz's Use and Abuse of Judaism and Islam", in M. Dascal and E. Yakira (eds.), *Leibniz and Adam* (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects Ltd., 1993) pp. 283-297 (p. 294); RC, p. 2; and Yuen-Ting Lai, "Leibniz and Chinese Thought", in Allison Coudert, R. Popkin and G. Weiner (eds.), *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), pp. 136-168 (pp. 142-143).

beliefs of the people; and insofar as its nature was rational and therefore abstruse to the mass of uneducated people (the "uninitiated"); metaphysics is *esoteric*.<sup>5</sup> Leibniz did not seek to effect peace by gaining assent of the people to a metaphysical doctrine: he knew, rather, that the vast majority of people were better suited to the less intellectual and more metaphorical, symbolical and poetical forms that typified the religious type of writing; what, by contrast with the esoteric form of metaphysics, may be termed the *exoteric*.<sup>6</sup> On this issue, Leibniz writes in the *New Essays*:

If [a judicious person] is writing for ordinary readers, he will deprive himself of the means for giving charm and emphasis to what he writes if he abides strictly by fixed significations for the terms he uses. What he must do -and this is enough- is to be careful not to let the variations generate errors or fallacious reasoning. The ancients distinguished the 'exoteric' or popular mode of exposition from the 'esoteric' one which is suitable for those who are seriously concerned to discover the truth; and that distinction is relevant here.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, unlike Plato, Leibniz did not at all disapprove of poetry. Indeed, he was something of a poet himself. In 1706 he had been involved in planning a philosophical poem which was to be written by the theologian and poet Johann Wilhelm Peterson. A draft of the plan states that

the talents of great men might serve to advance the public good to the greatest degree... namely [by] a fit and comprehensive work about divine matters in the form of a heroic poem. For theology, which shines forth in prose, would be even more sublime if dressed in Virgilian majesty...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines "esoteric" as "(of philosophical doctrine etc) meant only for the initiated, not generally intelligible"; and this should not be confused with words like "mystical" or "occult", even though these are the types of teachings often described as esoteric.

<sup>6</sup> The OED defines "exoteric" as "(of philosophical doctrine, mode of speech, etc) intelligible to outsiders... commonplace, ordinary, popular".

<sup>7</sup> RB, section 260.

<sup>8</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), pp. 115; LBr 720, f. 2v.



Leibniz was also involved in the editing of this poem.

The exoteric form, by its very nature, was more susceptible to variety of interpretation than the "strict signification of the metaphysical form", and it was this variety of interpretation that was often the root cause of the very schisms that religious harmonizing sought to overcome. Despite this, Leibniz realized that metaphysics would never overthrow exoteric accounts in the minds of the great majority of people. The exoteric had to be admitted; and the acceptability of any particular teaching was a question of whether or not it could be mapped onto the esoteric metaphysical doctrine, by virtue of the principles discernible behind its metaphors and symbols.

The metaphorical forms that were not acceptable included the visions and utterances of persons in ecstatic states, such as the Quakers and other enthusiasts. Spontaneous revelations of this sort had no guarantee of truth: they had no rational basis in a corresponding metaphysics. Moreover, spontaneous individualized claims to truth ran counter to the very notion of religious harmonizing itself.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding that species of exoteric writings known as mystical doctrine, Leibniz disapproves of their common assertion that, by following certain practices set out in the teaching, it is possible for the individual not only to "apprehend" God, but to "unite" with him. I will show in this thesis that Leibniz's metaphysics absolutely prohibits the possibility of the individual creature ever becoming united to, or absorbed in, the divinity. Though the universe of creatures advances towards ever greater perfection, ever closer to God, this process is literally endless. And apart from

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<sup>9</sup> Leibniz's position on enthusiasm is discussed in Daniel Cook, "Leibniz on Enthusiasm", in *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, pp. 107-135.



the metaphysical objections, Leibniz claims that the aim of union with God, cardinal to all mysticism, is driven by personal interest: the pursuit of a self-gratifying experience, such as bliss or peace.<sup>10</sup> Leibniz did not deny that individual creatures have a connection with God: indeed, he asserted that they exist in an intimate relationship with him, especially the rational ones. This relationship is capable of becoming more intimate, and such a realization constitutes an "approach" to the divinity (though the final attainment of this approach in the form of union is not possible).<sup>11</sup> In this thesis I will set out the precise nature of this relationship as it exists in Leibniz's philosophy, but for now it is sufficient to stress that, for him, the connection and approach to God by the creature is fundamentally a *rational* one. And this brings Leibniz into disagreement with some forms of mysticism, yet into agreement with others.

It is the more specifically *religious* mysticisms, which deny that God, or some degree of him, can be known by reason or the senses. This type of non-rational "spiritual apprehension" is diametrically opposed to Leibniz's philosophy; and its spontaneity is always subject to criticism by Leibniz anyway, on account of its counter ecumenicalism.

But there also exist what may be termed philosophical mysticisms in which the rational is asserted to be integral to the creature-God relationship. Thus, in neo-Platonism the mind of the rational creature is regarded as an image of the divine, a finite expression of God's ideas. To contemplate innate ideas is to grasp part of the intellect of God, which is what may be called divine illumination, for these truths are

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<sup>10</sup> See Letter to Nicaise, 1697, Wn, p. 566.

<sup>11</sup> See Joseph Politella, "Platonism, Aristotelianism and Cabalism in the Philosophy of Leibniz", unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1938, p. 27. The extent to which Leibniz could be considered a mystic is discussed in Donald Rutherford, "Leibniz and Mysticism", in *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, pp. 22-46.

not only founded in God, they are God. But God is also known through the "book of the world": the order and goodness manifest amongst things is taken as a sign of his immanence. And the approach to God is, by the neo-Platonists, equated to that increase in knowledge, both of the truths of reason and of the order of the world, which results in "better" action and hence the experience of blessedness.<sup>12</sup>

It has been the opinion of some scholars that Leibniz was concerned to negate mysticism by showing why and how it ought to be replaced with rational metaphysics. Others have argued that Leibniz sought to enrich and deepen both the philosophical and mystical approach, by a sort of cross-fertilization.<sup>13</sup> I shall argue in this thesis that Leibniz's philosophy is a thoroughgoing rational one, in which truth and reality are defined in terms of, and therefore known only through, reason. There is no "mystical" as some other sort of reality or other means for its apprehension. The only meaning of "mystical" that Leibniz assents to is as that other mode of doctrinal presentation: the metaphorical: as exoteric version (for the uneducated) of the esoteric metaphysical doctrine. If Leibniz did indeed conceive of the mystical in this way, and approvingly, then it would be neither true to say that he sought to eradicate the mystical, nor that the mystical could "deepen" the metaphysical or vice-versa.

If Leibniz's method for obtaining the truth was eclectic, his method for presenting it was *conciliatory*. Rather than trying to impose his philosophy in an adversarial style, he preferred to win round his audience by presenting ideas in the form which would be most attractive. Having gained their attention and sympathy he would then employ counter arguments which were more likely to be listened to, and thus bring

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<sup>12</sup> On these themes in neo-Platonism see, for example, Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 1, 10-11; IV, 3, 10; III, 8, 2; VI, 9, 5.

<sup>13</sup> See Dieter Mahnke, *Leibnizens Synthese von Universalmathematik und Individualmetaphysik* (Halle: Max Miemeyer, 1925; and Albert Heinekamp, "Leibniz und Mysticism", in Peter Koslowski (ed.), *Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1988), pp. 183-206.



them towards his own views.<sup>14</sup> To intellectual correspondents Leibniz varied his presentation depending on whether they were Moderns, Scholastics, Theologians, or whatever. This explains the apparent duplicitousness of much of Leibniz's writings, including the extent to which he would indulge in, or distance himself from, allegorical (exoteric) doctrines. To those whom Leibniz wished to be seen as a Modern, he concealed his interest in doctrines like alchemy and Kabbalah; but with those of a mystical orientation, he was prepared to engage himself much more fully.<sup>15</sup>

Leibniz's apparent ambivalence towards the neo-Platonic mysticisms can be explained in these terms.<sup>16</sup> However, Leibniz does criticize neo-Platonic mysticism on account of its confusion of expression, the obscurity of its allegories, and even its outright mystification and corruption of the original Platonic message.<sup>17</sup> But these criticisms are not directed against the mystical mode of expression *per se*, i.e. the metaphorical and non-philosophical mode (the "exoteric"). Indeed, he himself appropriated certain terms from the ancient mysticisms. For example, "light" as a metaphor for the divine power of emanation; the "microcosm" for the individual created being; binary numbers as an image of creation.<sup>18</sup>

Neo-Platonism was a hugely influential body of teaching in the form of a mystical recasting of Platonism. It had been put together by Plotinus and been combined with the philosophies of Pythagoras, Philo, Aristotle and Stoicism. It is not to be doubted that Leibniz knew of the mystical works of the Ancient World. When and how he

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<sup>14</sup> See Mercer, pp. 49-59.

<sup>15</sup> See Stuart Brown, "Some Occult Influences on Leibniz's Monadology", in *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, pp. 1-21; and Politella, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> A discussion of why Leibniz sought to distance himself from neo-Platonism is to be found in Ross, "Leibniz and Renaissance NeoPlatonism", *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa* 22 (1983), 126-134.

<sup>17</sup> See Rutherford, pp. 22-24.

<sup>18</sup> See Stuart Brown, "Some Occult Influences on Leibniz's Monadology", p. 2.

came into contact with them, and whether or not he was influenced by them. I will discuss below. Numerous scholars have examined, both broadly and in detail, the extent to which the Leibnizian doctrine is similar to those ancient mysticisms.<sup>19</sup>

Candidates for the position of the exoteric philosophy closest to Leibniz's, are to be found not amongst those *religious* mysticisms, with their anti-rationalism, but amongst the *philosophical* mysticisms: those which asserted that God was known and approached by reason, and, further, those which conformed to the Christian message. In short, any kind of Christianized neo-Platonism was a potential exoteric parallel to Leibniz's metaphysical doctrine. One such was that of *Christian Lurianic Kabbalah*.

This was a synthesis of late Kabbalah (Lurianic) with Christian theology, carried out in Leibniz's own time. Two of the individuals who did this work were personally known to Leibniz: Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-1689) and Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698). The Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-1687) was associated with the project, as was his protégé Lady Anne Conway (1630?-1679), and her Quaker friend George Keith. More's involvement was looser and definitely ambivalent: his contributions were often polemical. But Conway and Keith collaborated with van Helmont in writing some of the key syncretistic texts; and Conway wrote her own book, in which many of the key ideas of kabbalistic doctrine were dealt with in a way that was philosophically superior to the other texts. In treating of the Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, I propose to draw chiefly on the works of von Rosenroth, van Helmont and Conway. The origin, development and doctrine of this body of thought is discussed in chapter 1.

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<sup>19</sup> See Mercer, pp. 174-200; Rutherford, pp. 25-33; Politella, *passim*; Rudolf Meyer, "Leibniz und Plotin", *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa* 5 (1971), 31-54; and G. Rodier, "Plotin: Sur une des origines de la philosophie de Leibniz", *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (Paris, 1902).



Although Leibniz had involved himself in the production of one or two exoteric accounts, for example, J.W. Peterson's poem, his primary interest in the relation between the rational esoteric and the metaphorical exoteric was in the reverse direction: namely, in showing how various exoteric accounts could be reduced to the esoteric single body of truth enshrined in his metaphysics. Such reduction would demonstrate the fundamental commonality of multiple exoteric philosophies: and this was to be the particular method by which he would contribute to harmonizing the religions.

Such a method implies that religious harmonizing need not require people to give up their own theological heritage: it would be enough if they could see and accept their differences were only superficial, their root principles being held in common (supposing that this could be shown). Leibniz, therefore, was advocating, wherever possible, a sort of syncretism of the world's religions and sects, based on the convergence of their various exoteric doctrines in a single body of esoteric truth. Only where this was not demonstrable should missionaries consider the traditional radical conversion of a people. This viewpoint is revealed by Leibniz's considerations on the missionary work in China.<sup>20</sup>

It seems to me that the main reason for Leibniz's interest in studying the writings of the different religions and sects was to rationalize what he could in these exoteric writings in order to see if they could be mapped onto his esoteric body of truth and thereby be harmonized with other religions. We see him doing this for the doctrines of the Catholic and Protestant sects in the *Catholic Demonstrations*; for Chinese theology in the *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*; and for the Jewish

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Cook and Henry Rosemont note that "Leibniz also appreciated that no other belief system would have an impact in that country unless it came to terms with the country's intellectual heritage. He therefore wrote the *Discourse* [on the Natural Theology of the Chinese], attempting to pour some Christian wine in Confucian and pre-Confucian bottles". RC, p. 33.



and Arab traditions.<sup>21</sup> It is this same harmonizing interest that led Leibniz to study the writings of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. Here, in this Christianized neo-Platonism Leibniz discovered a cosmological metaphor that came closest to his own doctrine.

But there was another aspect to these writings that appealed to Leibniz: the Christian Lurianic Kabbalah project was itself motivated by a harmonizing zeal. In chapter 3 I will discuss three modes for effecting theological and philosophical reconciliation that can be isolated in the various works of this project and the extent to which these relate to Leibniz's thinking. In particular I will show how van Helmont, in his *Thoughts on Genesis*, deconstructs Biblical words in a manner reminiscent of the kabbalists, to reveal an esoteric cosmology which is essentially Hermetic. Implicit in this reduction of Scripture to an underlying body of (Hermetic) principles is that these go a long way towards providing a unitary cosmological meaning, the acceptance of which would allow it to function as the single esoteric doctrine to which the various exoteric teachings of the religious schisms could be harmonized. Hermetic doctrine, which principally grew out of neo-Platonism, has an affinity with Leibniz's metaphysics when it is shown how these same principles are at the bottom of his doctrine.<sup>22</sup> Both the content of the Hermeticism of *Thoughts on Genesis*, as well as the mode of religious harmonizing implicit in the work, would have attracted Leibniz a great deal, and goes a long way towards explaining why Leibniz became involved in *Thoughts on Genesis*, and why he was able and eager to contribute to the project.

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<sup>21</sup> See Daniel Cook, "Leibniz's Use and Abuse of Judaism and Islam", p. 288.

<sup>22</sup> Bernardino Orio de Miguel has made the most thorough study to date of the Hermeticism contained in *Thoughts on Genesis*. See OH.

In this thesis I will show how, by setting out a detailed account of Leibniz's cosmology and comparing it with that of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, the latter may be viewed as a symbolic exoteric parallel to the Leibnizian metaphysic. It is the common underlying neo-Platonic principles that allow the one to be mapped on to the other. The comparative work is corroborated by analysing Leibniz's own remarks on the kabbalistic texts and by examining the work Leibniz did on van Helmont's draft of *Thoughts on Genesis*.

That these underlying neo-Platonic principles are definitely to be found in the Leibnizian philosophy long before he could have had any significant knowledge of the Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, strongly suggests that Leibniz was *not* conceptually influenced by this latter, and that the interest he had in it was not as a source of philosophical inspiration.

Various scholars have recognized the presence of certain neo-Platonic principles in the writings of both Leibniz and of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, in particular, of van Helmont. At the same time they have noted Leibniz's knowledge of the latter's works. These scholars are divided on the question as to whether Leibniz was influenced or not by this brand of Kabbalah. By "influence" I mean the *adoption of concepts* into the Leibnizian doctrine. However, a problem that faces all attempts to pin down specific sources of neo-Platonic ideas, is the widespread currency that this doctrine had in Leibniz's time.<sup>23</sup> Where i) it can be shown that the neo-Platonic concepts were already established in Leibniz's cosmology prior to his familiarity with Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, it has to be conceded that the latter could not have conceptually influenced him on these themes. In this case the similarity of the two philosophies has

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<sup>23</sup> See Mercer, p. 177; and Eileen O'Neil, "Influxus Physicus", in Steven Nadler (ed.), *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).



to be seen as an instance of mere intellectual convergence. On the other hand if ii) it can be shown that these concepts are *lacking* prior to, but present after, Leibniz's significant contact with Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, then the case for conceptual influence can be argued for.

Of those studies which fall under i), Daniel Fouke notes that "as early as 1676, there are marked Neoplatonic patterns in Leibniz's explanation of the relation between the world and God".<sup>24</sup> He argues that the particular interpretation of the process of emanation which is present in Leibniz's cosmology, is the same as that Christianized neo-Platonism developed by Thomas Aquinas, and whom Leibniz knew "as early as 1670".<sup>25</sup>

Leroy Loemker has investigated the role that the Herborn Encyclopaedists played in the development of Leibniz's metaphysics. He proposes that

their primary influence on Leibniz was the transmission of a... new Platonistic metaphysics of universal harmony governing a multitude of interrelated, vitalistically conceived individuals.<sup>26</sup>

He shows the presence of ideas in Leibniz and the Encyclopaedists which were similar to those in Plotinus, Augustine, and the Renaissance eclectics Cusa, Bruno and Campanella. He concludes that "surely the Herborn thinkers constitute a neglected but significant link between these thinkers and Leibniz".<sup>27</sup> Loemker shows that Leibniz had read the *Phosphorus Catholicus* by John Bisterfeld, one of the

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel Fouke, "Emanation and the Perfections of Being", in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994), 168-194, (p. 183).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>26</sup> Leroy Loemker, "Leibniz and the Herborn Encyclopedists", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 22 (1961), 323-338 (p. 324).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 338.

Encyclopaedists, before 1666, and indicates that Platonic ideas found there are also present in Leibniz's embryonic works of the Mainz period (1667-1672).<sup>28</sup>

Christia Mercer, in her extensive investigation of the early Leibniz, concludes that "the basic features of his Platonism were in place in 1671-72".<sup>29</sup> She shows that it was as a student at Leipzig in the late 1660s that Leibniz absorbed this Platonism through his teachers, in particular, Jakob Thomasius and Johann Adam Scherzer. Through these teachers Leibniz would have learnt about the ideas of Plotinus, Philo, Proclus, Augustine, Ficino, Pico, *et al.*<sup>30</sup>

Bernardino Orio de Miguel has argued at length for an Hermetic interpretation of Leibniz's philosophy, in particular, on account of the presence of the principle of universal harmony, which is elaborated by Leibniz as universal vitalism and organic continuity. Pointing out that the Hermetic tradition had its origins in Parmenides, Plato and the neo-Platonists, he accepts that Leibniz's philosophy was "constructed around an early reading of the German mystical tradition and neo-Platonism".<sup>31</sup> His thesis is that Leibniz was concerned to extract a common denominator out of the eclectic array of writings broadly classed as Hermetic: those of neo-Platonism, along with its subsequent manifestations in, for example, Gnosticism, Kabbalism, German Mysticism, and the School of Florence. Most of these texts were presented in mystical language: they were "theosophical", "symbolic" or "coded". On account of the (essentially neo-Platonic) *principles* Leibniz found in these texts, and which he approved of, he sought to extract a single doctrine, purged of confusion and obscurity,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 330, 333-335, 337.

<sup>29</sup> Mercer, p. 175. Mercer does not apply the term neo-Platonism to those thinkers traditionally so referred, such as Plotinus or Proclus, believing there is an insufficient difference between them and the philosophy of Plato. On this, see *ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 176-178, 200-205.

<sup>31</sup> OH, ii, 423. ["construido sobre una precoz lectura de la tradición mística germana y del neoplatonismo"] See also pp. 423-425, 431.



and at the same time embraced Modern scientific thought. Orio de Miguel explains Leibniz's interest in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah in this way. Although this particular brand of Hermeticism was special to Leibniz insofar as he knew von Rosenroth and van Helmont, and, in particular, that he colluded with the latter on *Thoughts on Genesis*, Orio de Miguel concludes that ultimately Christian Lurianic Kabbalah had no special importance, but was just one particular example of Hermetic thought.<sup>32</sup>

Of those scholars who fall under ii) above, namely, that neo-Platonic principles are absent prior to, but appear after, Leibniz's significant contact with Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, I will mention three important studies. Allison Coudert, whilst acknowledging that both Leibniz and van Helmont shared the common intellectual heritage of Renaissance neo-Platonism, and, further, that Leibniz knew of Kabbalah prior to the period of his main contact with van Helmont, claims that the latter, by introducing Leibniz to the *Lurianic form* of Kabbalah, "had a decisive influence in shaping Leibniz's *Monadology*"; that the "source for many of Leibniz's most important ideas was the Lurianic Kabbalah, which Leibniz came to know through... Francis Mercury van Helmont".<sup>33</sup> Coudert notes that in order to establish this influence it has to be shown that Leibniz's philosophy

continued to evolve between 1694 and 1698 when his contact with van Helmont was most intense; and... that it evolved in ways that can be attributed to van Helmont's influence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> OH, ii, 425, 431-432. Justin Smith has noted that there is a continuity "between Leibniz and the earlier Christian Platonic tradition... which also may be seen as fusing at some points with other, more straightforwardly mystical traditions, such as hermeticism and Kabbalism, and thereby coming to include many of Leibniz's contemporaries, such as Anne Conway and Francis Mercury van Helmont". See his "Christian Platonism and the Metaphysics of Body in Leibniz", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

<sup>33</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 8, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.



This view is also the opinion of Anne Becco, who writes that Leibniz's

interest in van Helmont is central to [his work], through the influence it had between 1694 and 1696, the key moment of the definitive rooting of the Leibnizian system.<sup>35</sup>

However, she does not claim that van Helmont was a source of ideas new to Leibniz, and so influenced him in this way. She accepts that Leibniz had known of neo-Platonic ideas and terminology since his youth, but argues that these did not become *accepted into* his philosophy until the 1694-1696 period. Van Helmont's role in their acceptance she describes as one of "reactivation".<sup>36</sup>

The case for conceptual influence depends on showing that certain concepts present in the doctrine of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah *enter* Leibniz's philosophy after about 1694 and can be shown to be attributable to a source such as van Helmont. Coudert, in mentioning emanation and its cosmological ramifications, rightly notes the presence of this in Lurianic Kabbalah and how it forms the basis of Leibniz's mature conception of monadology.<sup>37</sup> Although Coudert, like Becco, does not claim that van Helmont was the unique source for these ideas, she too argues that it was at the time of Leibniz's most intense involvement with van Helmont (1694-1696), that he *adopted them*.

In arguing this point, Coudert attaches much weight to Leibniz's involvement in *Thoughts on Genesis*. She writes that "Leibniz wrote this book for van Helmont",

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<sup>35</sup> Anne Becco, "Leibniz et F.M. van Helmont: Bagatelle pour des monades", in *Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft*, 7 (1978), 119-142 (p. 137) ["L'intérêt philosophique de van Helmont se situe en fait au point central de l'oeuvre de Leibniz, par 'influence qu'il a eue entre 1694 et 1696, moment clé de l'enracinement définitif du système leibnizien'."]

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>37</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 84-85, 78-79.

implying not so much that he edited a draft version already taken down from van Helmont, but rather that the ideas contained in the published work are Leibniz's than van Helmont's. She goes on to say that

behind this text written by Leibniz in van Helmont's name lies another text written by van Helmont, a text that first appeared in the first volume of the *Kabbala Denudata*.<sup>38</sup>

This other text is the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, one of the better cosmological works of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. Thus, Coudert is arguing that the presence of certain ideas in *Thoughts on Genesis* is evidence of Leibniz's having adopted them; and that it was in the *Cabbalistical Dialogue* that he got them. She argues that "Leibniz specifically says he 'read over' the *Kabbala Denudata* and therefore read this text". However, there is no such evidence that Leibniz ever did read the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*.<sup>39</sup>

Coudert argues that an "evolution" of Leibniz's philosophy began at this time. She cites as evidence apparent differences between the *New System* and the *Monadology*; the former representing the old doctrine yet to be influenced, and the latter representing a doctrine which has evolved under kabbalistic influence. She writes that the "discontinuity between minds and mindless substances still appears in the *New System* of 1695, but it entirely disappears in the *Monadology*".<sup>40</sup> However, the *New System* had been written primarily for a Cartesian audience. In accordance with his usual conciliatory mode of presenting his philosophy, Leibniz would have sought to colour his account of substances in such a way that it would not be unfavourably

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85. Leibniz's precise involvement in *Thoughts on Genesis* is discussed in chapter 2.3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 86. Leibniz's knowledge of the *Kabbala Denudata* and his knowledge of the *Cabbalistical Dialogue* is discussed in chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 79.



received, though, at the same time, would not actually contradict his fundamental principles.<sup>41</sup>

Whilst not claiming that van Helmont was the *original* source, Becco's claim that he "re-activated" key concepts for Leibniz nevertheless implies that they were not a part of the latter's philosophy before 1694-1696. But the evidence suggests that these concepts had been in place since about 1670, and were never relinquished. The apparent lack of them in different texts at different times can be explained by their simply having been left unstated and merely implicit, according to the conciliatory method of presentation.<sup>42</sup>

Mention should also be made of Carolyn Merchant's study, which emphasizes Anne Conway's role, in addition to van Helmont's, in the development of Leibniz's philosophy, with particular regard to the concept of the monad. Whilst not claiming that they conceptually influenced Leibniz -she says that "the basic elements that went into Leibniz's concept of the monad had been well developed by 1686"- she does argue that they were a key factor in the refining of this concept, that they "served to confirm and buttress his vitalistic view of nature and to stimulate the coalescence of his ideas into a 'monadology'".<sup>43</sup> Merchant appears to equate Leibniz's adoption of the term "monad" with the coalescence of his ideas on it. The term first appears in Leibniz's writings of the 1694-1696 period, which was the time of his greatest involvement with Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. Whilst not disagreeing that Leibniz may well have decided to use the term following his kabbalistic interactions, I have

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<sup>41</sup> See Stuart Brown, "Leibniz's 'New System' Strategy", in Roger Woolhouse (ed.), *Leibniz's 'New System' (1695)* (Florence: Leo S. Olschiki Editore, 1996), pp. 37-62.

<sup>42</sup> Christia Mercer notes: "those commentators who have made a careful analysis of a particular work or collection of closely related works from Leibniz's middle period have concluded that there is a group of unstated principles, assumptions, or simple philosophical tendencies that lie beneath the explicit statements of Leibniz's thought". See Mercer, p. 468.

<sup>43</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 267, 268.



found no new evidence that definitely suggests that it was from this source that the term came. It appears to be more associated with Anne Conway than van Helmont, only appearing in those works which she had been involved in (the *Principles*, the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* and the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*), and not in the draft notes to *Thoughts on Genesis*, nor, seemingly, in the conversations between Leibniz and van Helmont. Although Leibniz read the *Principles* in 1696/7, the term is only once used and rather insignificantly. The usage that might have inspired Leibniz was that in the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*. Merchant, like Coudert, seizes on this text; but she too cannot substantiate her claim that Leibniz read this text when he encountered the *Kabbala Denudata*.<sup>44</sup> A variety of sources have been argued for over the years, such as Nicolas of Cusa, Girolamo Cardano, Giordano Bruno, Henry More, Ralph Cudworth and Jakob Thomasius.<sup>45</sup> It seems to me that Merchant goes too far in trying to pin down specific Christian Lurianic Kabbalah texts as the sources of inspiration for this change of nomenclature and, by association, of the "coalescence" of Leibniz's thought on this concept.

The primary aim of this thesis is not to add to the work already done on when Leibniz's work was fully mature. I do, however, in my account of his cosmology, refer to texts written throughout his philosophical career, which support the argument that the key underlying principles are there all along from 1670. What this thesis does aim to add to the scholarship is an explanation as to why Leibniz was interested in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah and in being involved in the *Thoughts on Genesis* project, *if*, as seems to be the case, he was not after all inspired conceptually by it.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>45</sup> Bruno as source is argued for by E. Thouverez (ed.), *Discours de Métaphysique* (Paris, n.d.) and against by Ludwig Stein, *Leibniz und Spinoza* (Berlin: Reimer, 1890); More and especially Cudworth are cited as sources by Catherine Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Aiton argues for Thomasius in *Leibniz: A Biography* (Bristol: Adam Hilger, 1985).

In Part Two of this thesis, a detailed interpretation of Leibniz's cosmology is presented and compared with an account of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah cosmology. Other extensive comparative work carried out in this area has been done by Coudert and Orio de Miguel. Coudert, though keen to prove Christian Lurianic Kabbalah importantly influenced Leibniz, has provided an excellent comparative study of the two, focussing on the issues of the monad, individual freedom, theodicy, causation and language. Orio de Miguel has focussed on the Hermetic elements that are common to Leibniz and van Helmont; and he has made a special investigation of this by means of a close study of *Thoughts on Genesis*.<sup>46</sup>

This thesis is a study of cosmology and the cosmogonical process, both as they can be determined from Leibniz's writings alone, and how they compare with the (relatively symbolic) account of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. Apart from highlighting the many parallels to be found in these areas (a convergence that interested Leibniz from the viewpoint of religious harmonizing) this detailed comparison brings out many Christian Platonic elements which are embedded in Leibniz's thought, but which are usually overlooked. This is particularly pertinent to the subject matter of the final chapter "The Strata of Being", where it is argued that the kabbalistic *Adam Kadmon* is a potential metaphor for the Leibnizian plenum, whose monadic elements share the same divine and creaturely nature that *Adam Kadmon* does.

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<sup>46</sup> See OK and OH. Shorter discussions that compare the doctrines of Leibniz and Christian Lurianic Kabbalah include Orio de Miguel's "Adam Kadmon: Conway, Leibniz and the Lurianic Kabbalah", in *Leibniz and Adam*, ed. by M. Dascal and E. Yakira (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1993) pp. 267-282; and his "Leibniz und die 'Physischen Monaden' von F. M. van Helmont", in *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa*, 27 (1990), 147-156. See also Stuart Brown, "F.M. van Helmont: His Philosophical Connections and the Reception of his later Cabbalistic Philosophy", in *Oxford Studies in the History of Philosophy*, ed. by M.A. Stewart, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 97-116.



By unearthing these elements I hope to have derived an improved interpretation of Leibniz's cosmology: one which does not throw up the seeming paradoxes, or suggest vacillation on Leibniz's part, that other interpretations have been prone to do.<sup>47</sup>

*To summarize the thesis:*

Part One provides a background to Christian Lurianic Kabbalah and Leibniz's relationship to it. Chapter 1 provides a short history of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah and introduces its principal exponents. An account of its cosmological doctrine is set out, preparatory to the comparative work of Part 2. Chapter 2 deals with Leibniz's contact with the key exponents and their writings, and his collaboration on *Thoughts on Genesis*. Chapter 3 discusses aspects of the ecumenicalist motive of the project and Leibniz's reaction to them.

Part Two presents an interpretation of Leibniz's cosmology and compares it in detail with that of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, utilizing Leibniz's critical remarks and examining his contribution to *Thoughts on Genesis*. Subjects dealt with are: epistemological issues (Chapter 4); space, matter, time, motion, the nature and relationship of soul and body, the continuum (Chapter 5); creation (Chapter 6); and the relationship between God, the cosmos and individual created beings (Chapter 7). This comparative work will look for similarities between the two doctrines and make conclusions about them in regard to the question of influences on the development of Leibniz's thought. This work will identify the cosmological imagery used by Christian Lurianic Kabbalah and assess the extent to which it legitimately parallels Leibniz's doctrine. From this, general conclusions will be drawn concerning Leibniz's

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Wilson; and Glenn Hartz, "Leibniz's Phenomenalisms", *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992), 511-549.



interest in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah and the philosophical status that he came to attach to it. Along the way, this comparative work will also highlight some problematic and less well known issues in Leibniz's cosmology, such as, questions about the evolution and revolution of souls, and the divine or mundane status of monads.

## PART 1 LEIBNIZ AND CHRISTIAN LURIANIC KABBALAH

### Chapter 1 Christian Lurianic Kabbalah

#### 1.1 Jewish Kabbalistic Origins

In the second half of the twelfth century a book called *Sefer ha-Bahir* emerged in Southern France. This book, now generally taken to be the earliest extant kabbalistic work, combines, for the first time, the kabbalistic doctrine of the *sefirot* with Jewish mysticism.<sup>1</sup> The conception of the *sefirot* had their origin in a small work entitled *Sefer Yezirah* or Book of Creation, which was written between the third and four centuries, and which shows the influences of Neo-Pythagoreanism.<sup>2</sup> In this book, the first four *sefirot* emanate out of each other sequentially. Spirit emanates air, which emanates water, which emanates fire. God "engraved" on air the twenty two Hebrew letters from which the world and all its creatures were made. The cosmogonical process is thus emanative and linguistic; yet, the *sefirot* taken together are not considered to be identical with God.

In the *sefer ha-Bahir* the ideas in the *Sefer Yezirah* were developed under Gnostical and mystical influences. The *sefirot* are now associated with divine attributes: they are ten archetypes which together constitute a manifestation of the previously undifferentiated and unknowable godhead. The powers and symbols associated with these sefirotic modes of God are derived from, and corroborated by, the *Sefer ha-Bahir*'s mystical interpretation of the Bible.

Twelfth and thirteenth century Provence saw the early kabbalists developing Jewish versions of Neo-Platonic cosmology. This reached a high point with the work

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<sup>1</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 27.

of Isaac the Blind. He developed the symbolism in the *Sefer ha-Bahir* and wrote a commentary on the *Sefer Yezirah*, in which he presented a neo-Platonized version of the theory of the *sefirot*. Scholem defines Kabbalah "as the product of the interpenetration of Jewish Gnosticism and neoplatonism".<sup>3</sup>

However, these two, Gnosticism and neo-Platonism, represent opposing tendencies. On the one hand, there were kabbalists who produced cosmologies of a highly imagistic sort, utilizing the symbols of a judaized Gnosticism, such as the *Sefer ha-Bahir*. On the other hand, there was the desire for a more philosophical approach, in which the imagery of the established kabbalistic theosophy was regarded as merely the mythical exponent of some underlying set of concepts. This rather apologist tendency sought to substitute kabbalistic symbols with Platonic concepts.<sup>4</sup> In thirteenth century Spain, the more philosophical approach is typified by Azriel ben Menahem of Gerona and Isaac ibn Latif. Both drew on Jewish sources of neo-Platonism; but Isaac was additionally influenced by the Arabic interpretation of neo-Platonism (from where he took the theory of the Divine Logos), and he was an admirer of Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of the century the tension between the philosophical and mythical currents became the creative force behind the greatest work of Spanish Kabbalah, the *Zohar*. Its author was Moses de Leon, also an admirer of Maimonides. He distributed installments of his work, claiming that he had merely copied them from an ancient work which had fallen into his hands, and which had originally been composed in the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> There is something of the exoteric-esoteric distinction here. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 50, notes that "from the very beginning two opposing tendencies appear among the kabbalists, the first seeking to limit Kabbalah to closed circles as a definitely esoteric system, and the second wishing to spread its influence among the people at large". On the tension between the Gnostical-symbolical and the philosophical-conceptual in the history of Kabbalah, see *ibid.*, pp. 52-57 and *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, pp. 96-100.

<sup>5</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 49-53.



second century in Israel. It is this myth that was responsible for its being considered by the advocates of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, amongst many others, as a *Prisca theologia* text.<sup>6</sup> Von Rosenroth placed three sections of this work in the *Kabbala Denudata*.

An associate of Moses de Leon, Joseph Gikatilla, wrote a work which combined not only the philosophical and mythical Kabbalah but also that expounded in the *Zohar*. This work, entitled *Sha'arei Orah*, was utilized by von Rosenroth in his lexicon of the *Kabbala Denudata*.

Amongst the several destinations to which the Jews migrated following their expulsion from Spain in 1492, two are particularly important with regard to the history of Kabbalah. One was Italy, the other Palestine. In Italy, kabbalistic documents came to the attention of Pico della Mirandola, who instigated their translation. He came to believe that they represented a *Prisca* theology. In his *900 Theses*, he sought to demonstrate that these kabbalistic texts proved the truth of both the Incarnation and the Trinity, and, further, the implication that Kabbalah and Christianity must be concordant. Following Pico, Johannes Reuchlin, in his *De arte cabalistica*, developed this conception of a Christian-Kabbalah.<sup>7</sup>

In Palestine, in sixteenth century Safed, Jewish Kabbalah underwent a revolutionary development at the hands of Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria. Cordovero was probably the greatest philosophical thinker ever to call himself a kabbalist. It is not possible here to go into the new interpretations that he brought to such areas of kabbalistic study such as the *Zohar* and the theory of the *sefirot*. He was

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<sup>6</sup> On the historiography of the *Zohar*, see *ibid.*, pp. 213-243.

<sup>7</sup> On the history of Christian Kabbalah, see Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); J.L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1944); and Francois Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1964).

strongly influenced by Maimonides; and his major work was the *Pardes Rimmonim*, which appears in the *Kabbala Denudata*. But it was he who taught Luria, through whom the new school of Lurianic Kabbalah became established. Luria wrote little himself, but through his personality and oratory gained a discipleship who regarded him as the Messiah.<sup>8</sup> After his death it was his disciples who had to set down his ideas using notes they had, but often filling the gaps themselves or adding their own elaborations. These disciples included Hayyim Vital and Joseph ibn Tabul. Their writings are included in the *Kabbala Denudata*, along with the works of the later Lurianic propagators, Israel Sarug, Naphtali Bacharach and Abraham Herrera. In the *Kabbala Denudata*, Hayyim Vital's work is represented by his commentaries on the *Zohar* (KD 2, 2, 3-47 and 2, 2, 145-186) and his *Revolution of Souls* (KD 2,3, 243-478). Ibn Tabul's *Druschim* is an exposition of Lurianic cosmology (KD 1, 2, 28-51). This sparked the series of exchanges between Henry More and von Rosenroth, which followed the *Druschim* in the *Kabbala Denudata*. Naphtali Bacharach's work *Emek ha-Melech* (KD 1, 2, 150-172 and 2, 1, 151-346) is another detailed account of Luria's cosmology, which includes natural language ideas from the *Sefer Yezirah*. Abraham Herrera is represented by his *Porta Coelorum* (KD 1, 3, 1-192), which is Lurianic, and infused with neo-Platonism and natural language theory. Also included is his *Beth Elohim* (KD 2, 3, 188-242).

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<sup>8</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 76.



## 1.2 Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Francis Mercury van Helmont and

Lady Anne Conway

"Christian Lurianic Kabbalah" I use to refer to that body of writings which, in various degrees, drew on the doctrine of Lurianic Kabbalah and sought to connect it in some way with Christian theology. Some of these texts are primarily syncretistic; some simply blend in kabbalistic ideas with Hermetic and alchemical notions; others expound philosophies and note the existence of parallels in kabbalistic writings.

The principal exponents of this were Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Francis Mercury van Helmont and, to a lesser extent, though more philosophically, Lady Anne Conway. All three were at some time or another involved in the production of these different kinds of Christian kabbalistic synthesis.

The primary motive behind the project was the endeavour to bring an end to religious conflict by reconciling the apparent differences between theological doctrines. In chapter 3 I will discuss three different modes for doing this as they can be discerned amongst the writings of von Rosenroth, van Helmont and Conway.

Von Rosenroth was based in Sulzbach, Germany, where from 1668 until his death in 1689 he held a high advisory office at the court of Prince Christian August, Duke of Sulzbach. Van Helmont, despite an association with the court from the early 1650s, lived the life of a roaming scholar.<sup>9</sup> In 1662, as a prisoner of the Inquisition, he wrote his first book, the *Alphabeti vere naturalis*. This book expounds a natural or Adamic

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<sup>9</sup> The best bibliographical account of these individuals is to be found in Allison Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698)* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).



language theory reminiscent of that in the *Emek ha-Melech* and the *Porta Coelorum*, both of which von Rosenroth would publish in the *Kabbala Denudata*.<sup>10</sup>

From 1670 until 1679, apart from brief visits abroad, van Helmont resided at Ragley Hall, Anne Conway's Warwickshire home. It was during this time, with its inmates of Anne Conway and van Helmont, and Henry More a regular visitor, that Ragley Hall became an English satellite of Sulzbach: tracts to be included in the *Kabbala Denudata* would be sent to Ragley from von Rosenroth, where they would be commented on or edited before being sent back. At times Ralph Cudworth would be drawn into the process.<sup>11</sup> It was at this time that More wrote a number of essays critical of aspects of Kabbalah, which were included in the *Kabbala Denudata*.

Henry More's philosophy, like that of the other leading Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, developed as a reaction against the mechanical philosophy. More had criticized Descartes for removing mind from nature, the consequence of which was that, with the exception of the human body, all matter was rendered inactive: no sufficient reason for a body's motion or existence could be given if it had no mental or spiritual principle in it. Whilst retaining the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, More, with his hylarchic principles, and Cudworth with his plastic natures, sought to re-introduce spiritual principles as the explanatory elements in nature, thereby re-uniting physics and metaphysics. It was the presence of a spiritual metaphysics that aroused More's interest in Kabbalah and neo-Platonism, and he accordingly studied the Christian Kabbalah, sifting the various ideas he discovered there, rejecting or

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<sup>10</sup> The *Alphabeti* and its sources are discussed in Allison Coudert, "Some Theories of a Natural Language from the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century", in *Magia, Naturallis und die Entstehung der Modernen Naturwissenschaften. Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft*, 7 (1978), 56-114 (pp. 56-91) and in her *Impact of the Kabbalah*, pp. 58-99.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Popkin, "The Spiritualistic Cosmologies of Henry More and Anne Conway", in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. by Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), pp. 97-114, (p. 105).

accepting, adapting and modifying, as they would serve his purposes. More, like von Rosenroth and van Helmont, thought Kabbalah was a *Prisca Theologia*, transmitted from Moses via the Egyptians, Pythagoras and Plato. In his *Conjectura Cabbalistica* of 1653 there is contained a blend of the *Prisca* texts, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Cartesianism and Christian kabbalism. This latter drew on the christianized Spanish Kabbalah of writers such as Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, for it was not until the 1670s, when von Rosenroth began sending More tracts that would be included in the *Kabbala Denudata*, that he learned of the later Lurianic version. But More's overall attitude to Kabbalah was highly ambivalent. Though he found much in it to support his re-spiritualizing programme, there was also "rubbish in amongst the gold", a result, he believed, of contamination during its transmission down through the ages. The Lurianic development he felt was a further corruption of the original Kabbalah, and he called it, amongst other things, crass, anthropomorphic and needlessly enigmatic, the result of Aristotelian obfuscation.<sup>12</sup>

Anne Conway shared More's objections to the dead mechanism of Cartesianism, but what came to constitute for her a solution to the ontological problems it raised, did not conform with that of More.<sup>13</sup> With van Helmont's arrival on the Ragley scene she found herself exposed to his interpretation of kabbalistic ontology in the form of monism. Whereas the Cambridge Platonists More and Cudworth maintained a dualism of mind and matter, two essentially distinct substances, the former informing the latter, van Helmont espoused a monism of which mind and matter were merely the names given to relative positions on a continuum that consisted of but one type of

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<sup>12</sup> There is an extended discussion of More's relationship with Kabbalah in Brian P. Copenhaver, "Jewish Theologies of Space in the Scientific Revolution: Henry More, Joseph Raphson, Isaac Newton and their Predecessors", *Annals of Science*, 37 (1980), 489-548.

<sup>13</sup> A comparison of the doctrines of More and Conway is made by Popkin, *ibid.* See also Carolyn Merchant.



substance. This vitalist metaphysics was the one towards which Conway was drawn, and she set down her ideas in her *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, seemingly between 1672 and 1673.<sup>14</sup> The *Principles* is the most philosophical work within the corpus of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. It contains references to the *Porta Coelorum* and the *Druschim*.

There were other developments that would take place at Ragley. Van Helmont, who had mixed in Quaker circles for some time, discussed their ideas and practises with Conway. Soon representatives of the sect would be paying visits to them at Ragley, including their founder George Fox. But it was George Keith who was to be the most important visitor. He had been struck by what he saw as remarkable similarities between Quaker doctrine and that of the Kabbalah. Quakers eschewed the idea that Christ's presence had departed at his historical death, leaving men with only the (dead) written words of his life and teachings and the traditions built on them by the Church. Rather, they thought that the presence of Christ continued to dwell on Earth in each individual; and, amongst other similarities, it was the vitalism in kabbalistic metaphysics which provided a basis for this inner presence.<sup>15</sup> Keith eventually collaborated with Conway and van Helmont to write *A Cabbalistical Dialogue*, the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* and *Two Hundred Queries*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The MS was taken by van Helmont, following her death in 1679, to the continent, where it was published as the first item in the Latin *Opuscula Philosophica*. See Merchant, p. 257. In the same year, an English version appeared in Amsterdam, then in London in 1692. See Popkin, p. 103.

<sup>15</sup> Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah*, pp. 181-92.

<sup>16</sup> On the joint authorship of the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, see Brown, "F.M. van Helmont", p. 104; and of the *Two Hundred Queries*, see Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah*, p. 241. Scholem attributes the *Adumbratio* to van Helmont, but he does not cite his evidence. See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1974), pp. 200, 417. Copenhagen points out that parts of Conway's *Principles* are very similar to the ideas of George Keith and those expressed in the *Adumbratio*. See his, "Jewish Theologies of Space", pp. 527-528. It seems likely that this work, like the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, which also appears in the *Kabbala Denudata*, in the same dialogue format, was jointly produced by van Helmont, Conway and Keith. Indeed, chapters 4 and 5 of the *Adumbratio* make specific references to the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*.



*A Cabbalistical Dialogue in answer to the Opinion of a learned Doctor in Philosophy and Theology that the World was made of Nothing...* is a cosmological text inspired by Lurianic Kabbalah. As the fuller title indicates it was written as a riposte to Henry More's essay *Foundation for philosophy or for the Eagle-Boy-Bee of the cabbala*, which criticizes kabbalistic creation theory. It was included in the *Kabbala Denudata* immediately following More's essay.

The *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* is an example of a syncretistic text which parallels Lurianic Kabbalah with the New Testament. It too was included in the *Kabbala Denudata*.

The *Two Hundred Queries moderately propounded concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls, and its Conformity with the Truth of the Christian Religion* seems to have been written between 1674 and 1679.<sup>17</sup> An important source for this book was the *Revolution of Souls* by Hayyim Vital.

In 1676 van Helmont, a Roman Catholic, converted to Quakerism; and he was followed the next year by Anne Conway, who had been in the Anglican church up to that time. Their actions indicate the passion with which they held to their philosophical ideas, since the Quakers were looked on with suspicion and disdain, and their conversions were socially very radical acts. More, in particular, was appalled.

In 1679 Anne Conway died aged 49. Van Helmont's position at Ragley was no longer tenable and he left England. Over the years that followed, until his death in 1698, van Helmont would publish several further books. For most of these an amanuensis would be employed, who would note down van Helmont's ideas then present them in the way he thought best for publication. The works that appeared

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<sup>17</sup> Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah*, p. 241.

during this last period, and which I shall draw on, fall into three categories. i) There are those which set out van Helmont's essentially Hermetic doctrine of nature: the *Paradoxal Discourses* of 1685, *The Spirit of Diseases* of 1692 and *The Divine Being* of 1694. Each of these includes important sections that deal with cosmology. ii) There is the *Seder Olam* of 1693, which syncretizes Christianity and Lurianic Kabbalah.<sup>18</sup> iii) There is the *Rabbinical and Paraphrastical Exposition of Genesis I* of 1682 and *Thoughts on Genesis* of 1697, which seek to re-interpret the words of Genesis in terms of Helmontian Hermeticism. The amanuensis for this latter was none other than Leibniz: proof of this and the precise nature of Leibniz's involvement will be discussed in chapter 2.3.

### 1.3 Cosmological Doctrine

Although the fundamental neo-Platonism of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah was not uniquely derived from what was implicit of it in Jewish Kabbalah, the specific cosmology which it embraced did come from the Lurianic writings that von Rosenroth had amassed. The literature clearly shows the presence of distinct features of Lurianic cosmology: the cosmogonical event of the *zimzum*; the world as emanated

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<sup>18</sup> Scholars have vacillated over the issue as to whether or not van Helmont was the author of this book. It is probably the case that, as with most of his publications, van Helmont was the source of the ideas, of which the text appears by way of an amanuensis, who took notes then arranged them in a suitable form for publication. It seems reasonable in such cases to refer a book to the originator of the ideas. Leibniz says to different correspondents at the beginning of 1695 that he believes that a medical friend of van Helmont had written the book. (See letters to von der Hardt, 28 December/7 January 1695, A, 1, xi, 851; and to Hertel, 8 January 1695, A, 1, xi, 852.) But in his journal record of conversations he had with van Helmont on 9 August 1696, he reports that "I remonstrated with him about his [sein] *Seder Olam*...". (See Pe, p. 191.) This suggests that Leibniz is now apprised as to whom the contents of the book are best referred to. Furthermore, the *Seder Olam* includes in its binding an appended work called *A Few Questions*, of which van Helmont is explicitly stated to be the author. In his critique (of 1694-95), which covers both works, Leibniz makes no suggestion that he is dealing with different authors when his remarks pass on from the *Seder Olam* to *A Few Questions*, as is evident by his use of "author" in the singular: "...and the author says further on (question 24, on the Apocalypse) that...". (See FoL, p. 52.)



by God, but not substantially identical with him; the four "worlds" or strata of being; universal vitalism and the emergence of matter; the revolution of souls; and, in particular, the conception of *Adam Kadmon* as the cosmological *ens medium*.

The rest of this chapter is given over to an exposition of the cosmology of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, preparatory to its comparison with Leibniz's cosmology in Part 2. This comparison will allow an assessment of the extent to which parallels might exist between the two.

For my account of the cosmology of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah I have drawn on the following publications. i) Anne Conway's *Principles*. ii) Van Helmont's *Alphabeti, A Paraphrastical Exposition, Two Hundred Queries, Paradoxal Discourses, Spirit of Diseases, Seder Olam, The Divine Being* and the draft notes for *Thoughts on Genesis*.<sup>19</sup> iii) Von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata*, including: his own contributions; original Jewish Lurianic texts published there, such as Abraham Herrera's *Porta Coelorum*, and Naphtali Bacharach's *Emek ha-Malech*; and the joint contributions by Conway, van Helmont and George Keith: the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* and the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*. iv) I have also drawn at times on the work of modern scholarship, principally that of Gershom Scholem, to supplement my interpretation of Lurianic creation theory.

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<sup>19</sup> Since the published version of *Thoughts on Genesis* follows Leibniz's editing, a purer account of van Helmont's ideas is to be found in the pre-edited draft. What Leibniz added to this draft will be used in Part 2 for comparing the cosmologies of Leibniz and Christian Lurianic Kabbalah.



### 1.3.1 The Fundamental Nature of the Cosmos

#### *Space, Matter, Time and Motion*

In the cosmology of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, space is considered to be a *mode* of created substance, and should be comprehended in the same way as for numerical notions. In *The Spirit of Diseases*, van Helmont writes that "Three-fold Dimension or Locality, is onely an Accident and not an Essential Property of Bodies".<sup>20</sup> That space is a modal relation of an ideal numerical kind is also apparent in Conway's discussion both of the number and magnitude of creatures, and of the containment of creatures within each other. Since any number, however great, can always be increased, and that infinitely or without end, so there is no limit to the number, the quantity, or the magnitude (either of the individual or of the totality) of creatures that God can create:

If the universe were divided into such tiny atoms that one hundred thousand were contained in a single poppy seed, who could deny that the infinite power of God could make this number greater and greater by multiplying to infinity... which can never be so great that it cannot be increased to infinity by addition or multiplication?<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, any measure of space, since it is a numerical entity, can be decreased or divided infinitely, or without end, such that there can be no limit to the small, or, there can be no atoms:

The same argument shows that not only the entire universe or system of creatures as a whole is infinite or has infinity in itself, but even every creature, no matter how small, which we can see with our eyes or conceive of in our

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<sup>20</sup> *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 45.

<sup>21</sup> *Principles*, p. 16.

minds, has in itself such an infinity of parts or rather of entire creatures that they cannot be counted... And since no creature could be so small that a lesser could not exist, so no creature is so big that a larger one could not always exist.<sup>22</sup>

How it is that an infinity of creatures can be produced out of God's mind will be investigated later; but for now it is important to indicate that this, combined with the conclusion that there is no upper or lower limit to spatial magnitude, points to the plenum: that everywhere in nature, no matter how small or large the volume examined, not only will created being, but an infinity of such created beings, always be found: "In every creature, whether spirit or body, there is an infinity of creatures, each of which contains an infinity in itself, and so on to infinity."<sup>23</sup>

When "body" is defined as that aspect of a creature which is extended, it follows that, since space is a mere ideal relation, body is not a real substance in itself extended through space, but rather a mode. What is called "body" is nothing more than an ideal limitation, imposed on nature, and not a real separation into absolutely distinguished bodies: which is what is meant when van Helmont says that truly all bodies are united in the one body of spiritual water:

When we say that a Body is of such a Dimension in Heighth, Length and Breadth, this is no more than a Limitation made in our Thoughts to distinguish one Body from another: For to speak properly, there is no separation or Division of Bodies, with respect had to the Universe, but all Bodies are so united together, that it is impossible indeed and in truth, to separate one Body from another: because the whole World being one Creature, no part of it can be so separated from the other, as that it should be no more in the World; even as all things, that is, all particular Bodies proceeded from one and the same Principle the Water, and can be resolved again into the same, as hath already been showed.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 17. See also p.20: "There can be no actual division in matter which cannot always be further divided... without end."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 15.



If matter, like body, is defined as that which is extended, then, matter also is nothing but a mere order relation, a mode imposed on "spiritual water", a mere appearance:

*Matter* as such, is not allowed to be so much as a substance, but to be only a certain *extrinsecal* and *accidental modification* of a *spiritual substance*...  
*Matter*, as such, is not a *spirit*; but only that very Substance itself, which appeareth under the form of *Matter*.<sup>25</sup>

The material body of a creature, then, is not a substantial thing in itself, but a certain (modal) delimitation of some underlying spiritual substance, which, on account of the infinite divisibility of nature must itself be a plenum; and so this corporeal delimitation does not represent a single being of the underlying substance separated out, but rather embraces the (infinite) multiplicity of beings that will constitute any particular volume of the plenum.

But what is the nature of these beings which are aggregated into the appearance of matter? Conway is certain that they are not the physical atoms such as those proposed by Henry More. His belief that the divisibility of matter has a limit in smallest parts which are yet "discerpible" no further, and which constitute nature, is rejected by Conway as a "fallacy which logicians call comparing incomparables, namely, joining words or terms which imply contradiction or absurdity."<sup>26</sup> Rather, a body is a three-dimensional modification of spiritual substance: not a single spiritual being existing by itself, but, as a volume of the spatial plenum, an aggregation of infinite single spirits, or monads: "*Matter* is made by a Coalition or Clinging together of *Spiritual* degenerate *dull Monades* or single Beings."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 8. See also *Principles*, pp. 41-42: "Creation is one entity or substance in respect to its nature or essence... so that it only varies according to its mode of existence, one of which is corporeality."

<sup>26</sup> *Principles*, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 9.



Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, in speaking of the type of spirits contained in a body of matter, emphasizes an essentially negative quality about them: they are privation, or degeneration of spiritual nature, now darkened, dull or at rest: Matter is the appearance of spirit "in its blindness or darkness... its *dull* rest, and privation of its former happiness", <sup>28</sup> and "might be said to consist in... singular monads, points destitute of proper motion". <sup>29</sup>

In Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, time, like space, is a *modal relation* dependent on (already existing) substances: it is consequent on the world, is a relative order of successive configurations between individual substances. As van Helmont says in *The Divine Being*:

Time is no thing else but a Limitation, we conceive in our thoughts, either according to the Course of the Sun, or the motion of any other thing from one place to another. Now where there is a Limitation or Measuring, there must of necessity be some Created thing, by or according to which the said Measuring is performed. <sup>30</sup>

Space is the order relation between a plurality of substances, and both time and motion represent an ordering of changes between one spatial configuration and another. Conway says: "Time is nothing but the motion or change of creatures from one condition or state to another", <sup>31</sup> and "times [time periods]... are nothing but successive motions and operations of creatures". <sup>32</sup> Like space, time is to be treated as a numerical entity. That is, in the same way that any numerical quantity can be increased or decreased indefinitely, so any time period, whatever its magnitude, and irrespective of whatever units of measurement are employed, can be increased or

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Adumbratio*, p. 29. See also *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 11: "Matter is the privation of *spiritual nature*."

<sup>30</sup> Section 105.

<sup>31</sup> *Principles*, p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

decreased without end. Consequently, there can be no limit to how great a time period can be, which means that there is no definite greatest length of time with bounded limits, i.e. no ultimate beginning or end to time; nor can there be a limit to how small a time period can be: however much a length of time is reduced, there will never be reached a point at which there is no real change in the (spatial) order between substances through that time period. Indeed any and every time period may be said to contain an infinity of smaller time periods. Conway writes:

Just as no time is so great that it is not possible to conceive of a greater, so likewise no time is so small that a lesser may not be imagined, for a sixtieth part of a minute may be divided into sixty other parts and these into still others, and so on to infinity.<sup>33</sup>

Like space, the infinite divisibility of time results in the plenum: there can be no point reached at which, between two points of time, however close, there is no motion, no change of (spatial) configuration amongst substances: with respect to time, nature is fundamentally in flux.

### *The Nature and Relationship of Soul and Body*

Does Christian Lurianic Kabbalah consider that a creature is nothing more than a bodily amalgam of dull spirits, those "*spiritual degenerate dull monades*" referred to in the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*? If so, creatures could be nothing more than mere modal differentiations of the spirit plenum, and so not real individuals at all, which at the same time opens the door to pantheism. There is evidence throughout many of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



their writings that this is not the case, but, rather, that the notion of creature includes not only that of body but also that of soul. In *Two Hundred Queries* it is asserted that creatures, vegetable, animal and human, consist of two parts or aspects: a subtle substantial one (the "seed kernel" or soul) and a gross insubstantial one (the "husk" or body):

What is sown consisteth of two parts viz. The pure substance of the kernel, or Grain, which most properly is the Body, and the Inner Husk or shell that containeth it... The body of man hath in it two parts answering to these two in a grain of corn: one part more subtil and refined, which rather cleaveth to the body, than is a part of it. Now this gross part may be said to have no sense, or feeling, of what belongs to a Man, no more than a piece of red Earth or clay, which yet makes up a great part of the visible body of that which is commonly called the body of Man.<sup>34</sup>

Inasmuch as "body" refers to the spatial extension of a creature across the spirit plenum, it refers to an (infinite) multiplicity of spirits; but "soul", on the other hand, is referred to but a *single* such spirit. This is why the soul "rather cleaveth to the body, than is a part of it" because, though a soul is inextricably linked to a body (cleaveth to it), as a non-extended being it, necessarily, cannot be a (spatial) part of this body. Thus the ontological foundation of the body and the soul of a creature does not differ --it is the spirit plenum in both cases. Their difference resides in numerical quanta: the body consists of infinite spirits, but the soul only of one: "The distinction between spirit and body is only modal and incremental, not essential and substantial".<sup>35</sup> The explication of the nature of body and soul, and their relationship, therefore is to be discovered in the nature and relationship of the spirit substances of the plenum, specifically, how one of these (as soul) might be related to a multiplicity of them (as

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<sup>34</sup> *Two Hundred Queries*, section 118. See also *ibid.*, section 114: "For shall not every seed [or soul] have its own body?"

<sup>35</sup> *Principles*, p. 40.



body). Since space is merely ideal, or a mode of substance, the bodily aggregate, though composed of real substances, is, as aggregate defined by spatial extension, a mere mode; whereas the soul is not a collection of substances, modal or otherwise, but is a single actual substance. Now, what is a substance is immutable, and what is a mode is mutable. Soul, as an actual spirit substance, is therefore immutable; and body, as mode, is mutable, for the spirits which make up its aggregate come and go, and because of the infinite divisibility of time, this coming and going is unceasing, i.e. the body is in flux. The substantial soul is therefore incorruptible and exempt from annihilation, and endures for ever, whereas its associated body is in constant flux and does not endure for a moment:

This unity [soul] is so great that nothing can dissolve it (although the unity of the greater number of ministering spirits [its body] ... may be dissolved). Thus it happens that the soul of every human being will remain a whole soul for eternity.<sup>36</sup>

Even when this quality and manner of being changes suddenly, i.e. the dissolution of the body, or what is commonly called "death", the soul still endures, though, as I will show below, it endures still with an associated body, but a now much reduced one. It is on the basis of this argument that Christian Lurianic Kabbalah asserts the doctrine of the revolution of souls:

Why may there not also be a revolution of bodies, seeing the first matter, or substance of bodies [the soul] is incorruptible and is not annihilated, or evanished?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 55. See also *Two Hundred Queries*, section 114: "Though [a creature, over time] be not the same in quality and manner of being, yet shall it not be the same substance?"

<sup>37</sup> *Two Hundred Queries*, section 123.

Hence all creatures are eternally mutable: eternal by virtue of their souls, mutable by virtue of their bodily outward forms, of which no soul is ever without, and which mutate unceasingly and for all time.

But how is the single spirit substance of the soul related to the multiple spirit substances of the body, such that the soul always, inextricably, has a body?

According to Conway the single spirit of the soul is a *centre, ruler and principal* of the multiple spirits of the body. In order that a certain volume of the plenum can be meaningfully separated off from the rest of the plenum and be called "this body", it is necessary that there exists a principle which both provides a commonality to those spirits which are to be subsumed under that body, and which, at the same time, distinguishes them from what is "other" or "external" to that body. It is in this sense that a single principal spirit of the creaturely fragment of the plenum is called a centre:

This central, ruling or principal spirit... is called central because all the other spirits come together in it, just as lines from every part of the circumference meet in the centre and go forth from this centre.<sup>38</sup>

But this spirit is not only a principle of representation, but is also said to be the cause or formative principle of its body. To the extent that the aggregate spirits of the body as a whole are as they are by virtue of the principal spirit, so the soul is called the ruler of the body: it orders the spirits of the body, which collectively are to be considered its domain, and each of which stand in a causally subordinate relation to the ruling soul-spirit as soldiers to their general:

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<sup>38</sup> *Principles*, p. 55.

The spirit of man or brute is also a countless multitude of spirits united in [a] body, and they have their order and government, such that one is the principal ruler.<sup>39</sup>

With this conception of the soul-body relationship, the body is accordingly referred to as the instrument of the soul, for which the latter is the principle of motion. Conway states that there is an:

intimate union or bond which exists between spirits and bodies, by means of which spirits have dominion over bodies with which they are united, so that they move them from one place to another and use them as instruments in their various operations.<sup>40</sup>

The relationship between the soul and the body is illustrated further by alchemical terms. Some of these are what today would be called purely symbolical or analogical; others, however, easily fit into the context of energy physics. In all cases, the notion of the soul as active principle, and body as passive principle, is clearly expressed. That matter, out of which particular bodies are derived, is a "spiritual water", has already been met with ("All particular Bodies proceeded from one and the same Principle, the Water."<sup>41</sup>). But "fire" is also to be found: as the corresponding principle to the active soul. Since every creature has both a soul and a body, *The Spirit of Diseases* says that "the World and all the Creatures in it, consisteth of these two principles, and no more: viz. Fire and Water."<sup>42</sup> And since these two are inextricable in the creature, so "as every creature hath its vivifying Spirit or Fire, so it

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 39. See also, *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 33: "The fiery Spirit [soul] hath many spirits under its Dominion, which greatly differ from one another in their Efficiency or Operation... The fullest assurance that we can have of their truth, is from our own selves, when we consider of how many various Parts and Operations our Body consists, which different Parts must have their differing Spirits; though all of them under the Government and Superintendence of our Central Spirit."

<sup>40</sup> *Principles*, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 45.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., section 25.



must likewise have its female or Watery Essence." <sup>43</sup> And "as the nature of the fiery essence is to excite and make alive, so the *watery being of a cooling nature inclines creatures to rest.*" <sup>44</sup> In the draft notes for *Thoughts on Genesis*, van Helmont seeks to found the fire and water principles on Scripture using a kabbalistic interpretation of "schamaim", the Hebrew word for "heaven". As shall become apparent later, "heaven", in the Helmontian cosmology, is the spirit plenum out of which all creatures are made. By breaking down the Hebrew word "schamaim" into "esch" and "maim", which respectively mean "fire" and "water", van Helmont believes that he has proved from the revealed word of God that heaven, and thereby all the creatures derived thereof, are founded on these two principles: "Schamaim contains fire and water. Now *esch* is fire, and *maim* water... all things were made out of these two." Further on he mentions that "fire and water... is... matter and soul, light and dark." <sup>45</sup> It is a small step from this pair of terms to that of heat and cold as indicating the nature of soul and body. The soul is the active (fiery, hot) principle of the creature; the body is the passive (cold) and maleable flux (watery) principle. Both soul and body have the same ontological basis in spiritual substance:

*The soul must consist of the same principles, whence the body takes its original.* For if the soul did not consist of the very same principles whence the essence of the body doth proceed, she could never have any communion or fellowship with the body, because *two things of a different original can never unite or co-operate...* And therefore we conclude that the soul consists of a spiritual, fiery and watery essence. <sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., section 18.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., section 21.

<sup>45</sup> OH, I, 83, 85; LH.I.V. 2g, fol. 35.

<sup>46</sup> *The Divine Being*, section 90.

In the alchemical cosmology of *The Paradoxical Discourses* the pairs of terms are subsumed under the astronomical bodies of the Sun and the Moon. The Sun, which is male, the father, is the source of heat and fire, and consequently the active principle; the Moon is the female, the Mother, who is the principle of coolness and passivity. These solar and lunar principles are the active and passive principles present in every creature and which are modes of the underlying plenum of spirit substances:

And such a spiritual, and not corporeal Being, must we suppose the coolness of the Moon to be, by means of the spiritual coalition and commixture of which, with the spiritual warmth of the Sun, all comprehensible Beings are produced.<sup>47</sup>

It has been pointed out above that since the soul is a single spirit, rather than an extended collection of spirits, it is not a spatial part of the creature. The connection a soul has with its body is therefore not that of corporeal interaction: the soul does not rule and affect its body by physically colliding with its parts (but then the parts of the body are only collections of spirits, so even here, efficient cause by physical collision does not exist). And yet it is stated that the fiery principle informs and moves body, and does so as an incorporeal entity "more subtil and refined, which rather cleaveth to the body, than is a part of it",<sup>48</sup> and which ubiquitously penetrates this body "by a kind of penetration which is different from what any body or matter, however subtle, can accomplish, namely by its intimate presence."<sup>49</sup> And this intimate presence is that presence of soul as cause, to body as effect: soul as the reason for the form and changes of each and every part of the body: the intimate presence of the causal agency of rational order, inextricable from any and every part, as effect, to the point

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<sup>47</sup> *Paradoxical Discourses*, p. 10. See also p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> *Two Hundred Queries*, section 118.

<sup>49</sup> *Principles*, p. 68. See also *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 13.



of intimacy. This "power" of the soul within the creature to effect or unfold the changes in its body (to impart motion to it) is called an internal motion by Conway: it is the vitality of a creature, which proceeds from the will of its soul. External motion, or efficient cause, is "local and mechanical and in no way vital, because it does not proceed from the life of the thing so moved." Moreover,

if motion were communicated by local motion, this motion would be communicated by another, and this again by yet another, and so on to infinity, which is absurd.

Rather,

every motion which proceeds from the proper life and will of a creature is vital, and I call this the motion of life, which clearly is neither local nor mechanical like the other kind but has in itself life and vital power. This is the virtual extension of the creature.<sup>50</sup>

The (spatio-temporal) extent to which a soul is the ordering agent for a body, that is, is a ruler of a domain of spirits subordinated to it, is what Conway here calls the virtual extension of a creature.

The soul and the body, as they have now been defined, are mutually interdependent: it is senseless to speak of a body without a soul, or a soul without a body, as it is to speak of a cause without an effect, or an active principle without a passive, or light without dark, and so on. Hence a creature always has both a body and a soul. Now, since what a body really is is a multitude of spirits, each one of which, *as single spirit*, is a soul; and since a soul always has a body, it follows that all the individual constituent spirits of a body are themselves also at the same time souls

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<sup>50</sup> *Principles*, pp. 69, 70.



ruling over their own bodies or multitudes of spirits, each of which is a soul itself, and so on. Conway says that there

is also a countless multitude of spirits united in this body, and they have their order and government, such that one is the principal ruler, another has second place, and a third commands others below itself, and so on for the whole, just as in an army.<sup>51</sup>

### *The General Continuum*

Christian Lurianic Kabbalah affirms that every spirit has both an active and a passive aspect: it is active in relation to those spirits (the body) for which it is the causal principle in the rational order of nature, and which collectively are the domain over which its rulership extends; and it is passive in relation to that one spirit (the soul) for which it, along with the other spirits which make up a collection of spirits, is the effect in the rational order of nature, is that which is ruled over. This relationship of action-passion between individual substances is clearly a *relative* one; and consequently so too is the distinction of soul and body derived from it: souls are not pure activity, and bodies are not pure passivity; rather, the one is active in relation to the other, or, in Conway's words: "In every visible creature there is body and spirit, or a *more* active and a *more* passive principle."<sup>52</sup> There is no real distinction between soul and body: rather they represent the two directions along the continuum of active-passive, cause-effect, as it exists between individual spirit substances. What is active

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 39. See also *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 33: "The fiery Spirit hath many spirits under its Dominion, which greatly differ from one another in their Efficiency and Operation; many whereof have again their particular Dominion over others, like as in an Army, the *Generalissimo* commands the whole Army: but besides this very Regiment, Corps, etc have their own commanders, subaltern officers..."

<sup>52</sup> *Principles*, p. 38. My italics.

in the particular creature finds itself passive in the general continuum, as what is passive in the particular is yet active in the general; that is, the soul of any particular creature also has the aspect of body (on the general continuum), as the particular body also has the aspect of soul. It is in this sense that expressions that equate the spiritual and corporeal should be interpreted. Van Helmont says:

Seeing therefore every Spiritual thing is corporeal, and every corporeal thing is Spiritual, in some degree or measure; therefore all Creatures, from the highest to the lowest, have some relation and natural Affinity one to another; the highest to the lowest, and the lowest to the highest.<sup>53</sup>

Conway says:

Spirit and body are of one original nature and substance, and that body is nothing but fixed and condensed spirit, and spirit is nothing but volatile body or body made subtle.<sup>54</sup>

Every spirit is the soul (active principle) of a (spatially extended) bodily aggregate (passive principle) of spirits, which it subordinates; each of which in its turn is the soul of a smaller body of spirits, and so on. Van Helmont and Conway refer to the soul as a central spirit, and its body of spirits as a surrounding sphere, which is illuminated by the soul in the sense that the soul is that which activates its body of

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<sup>53</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 32. See also section 28: "Therefore Spirit and Body are not contrary Essences, as many do vainly and falsely affirm; for every created Spirit is corporeal, having in it the true essence and nature of a Body, viz. it is an extended Being, bounded, circumscrib'd with place, moveable, etc." And section 30: "For as every Spirit or Soul in the whole creatural system is a Body, having in it the true Essence and Attributes of a Body; so every Body is in some degree or measure Animal and Spiritual, i.e. hath Life, Sense and Knowledge; or at leastwise capable of those Attributes." See also the draft notes for *Thoughts on Genesis*, OH, I, 108; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 40, where van Helmont says: "Incorporeal spirit is minimum body"

<sup>54</sup> *Principles*, p. 61. See also p. 51: "Nor is there any difference between body and spirit... except that body is the grosser part and the spirit the more subtle."



spirits, and which can be enlarged or shrunken accordingly as the domain of rulership of the soul subsumes more or less other spirits of the plenum:

Spirit is better defined in the *Kabbala Denudata* as the central nature, which has the ability to emit a luminous sphere and to enlarge and to shrink it, which appears to be the meaning of Aristotle's *entelechy*.<sup>55</sup>

In the draft notes for *Thoughts on Genesis*, van Helmont says that created things consist of a light or seed (or soul) and an expanse of space around it (which he calls its "heaven"). This heaven is commensurate with the extent of the soul's rulership through the space surrounding it, and clearly relates to body. The influence of rulership van Helmont relates to illumination. Darkness is also present in the creature insofar as its rulership is subordinate to a higher one in the general continuum:

An expanse means a heaven, and there are as many heavens or expanses as stars. Every creature is its own heaven, for which it rules, even though it might be under another heaven which rules it... Each is its own enclosed heaven as long as it is a ruler.<sup>56</sup>

Because the soul-body aspect of creatures exist on a general continuum, in which soul is simply the active direction and body is the passive, all creatures may be said to possess a degree of corporeality, as well as a degree of spirituality, and to move towards the spiritual when their souls, as active principles, enlarge their spheres of influence, or to move towards the corporeal when their spheres of influence shrink: "There are many degrees of [corporeality] so that any thing can approach or recede more or less from the condition of a body or spirit."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>56</sup> OH, I, 92; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36r. See also OH, I, 86; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35r: "Every [created being] was a heaven, or a light, though dark was included in it."

<sup>57</sup> *Principles*, p. 42.



To procede from any point on the soul-body, active-passive, continuum, in *either* direction, is to discover creatures in every degree along the way. Now, because space is endlessly divisible, this containment and subordination of creatures within creatures is likewise endless: there can be no point reached at which the spirits subordinated in a body do not yet themselves subordinate further substances: the hierarchical chain of descent does not end in spirits which are purely passive. The conception of matter as that absolutely devoid of activity and life is that nature to which bodies are reduced when they die, according to common opinion. But in the philosophy of the vitalistic continuum there can be no absolute privation: "prime matter" does not exist. The corporeal is only privative *relative* to soul; and no body is without activity:

When common people perceive no motion in bodies, they call them from ignorance dead bodies without spirit and life. But truly there is no body anywhere which does not have motion and consequently life or spirit.<sup>58</sup>

An endless descent into ever more passive spirits, implies the existence of an infinity of ever darker spirits. The biblical phrase "darkness was upon the face of the deep" is interpreted by van Helmont in the draft notes to *Thoughts on Genesis* as "darkness was upon the faces of the abyss". The "faces" are the spiritual creatures which exist in the endless and ever darker abyss, that is, the passive direction of the continuum:

There must be infinite darkness, because there must be an infinite elaboration of light and dark. From where the abyss or that which has no bottom is attributed...

Now as many as there are creatures in the abyss, so there are faces of darkness, namely an infinity.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> OH, I, 88, 89; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36.

And these ever darker spirits do not finish in absolutely dark ones: "Darkness is not nothing or privation".<sup>60</sup>

With prime matter disposed of, and the corporeal conceived only as a mode of the spiritual, and vice-versa, Cartesian dualism is accordingly rejected:

Nor is there any difference between body and spirit (if body is taken not in their [the Cartesians'] sense, who maintain that it is merely a dead thing lacking life and the capacity for life, but in a proper sense, as an excellent creature of God, having life and sensation, which belong to it either actually or potentially), except that body is the grosser part and the spirit the more subtle.<sup>61</sup>

And if there can be no thing devoid of motion, there can be no thing devoid of life; and so, what we call death cannot be the opposite of life, but merely its diminution: "*Death or Dying, to speak properly, is not contrary to life.*"<sup>62</sup>

As space is the expression of the relation between spirits, and provides by virtue of its infinite divisibility the endless containment and subordination of creatures within creatures, towards the infinitely small, so, by virtue of its infinite aggregability, space also provides for an endless containment and subordination of creatures within creatures towards the converse direction: towards the infinitely large. That is, there can be no point reached at which the subordinating single spirit of a soul is not yet itself subordinated by another spirit: the hierarchical chain of ascent does not end in a spirit which is purely active (not a purely active *created* spirit: only God is such a one). "A body is always able to become more and more spiritual to infinity."<sup>63</sup> And, concerning a body or "enclosed heaven... there is an infinite expansion and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> *Principles*, p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 32.

<sup>63</sup> *Principles*, p. 42.



unlimitedness as long as there is the power of advancing".<sup>64</sup> On such a continuum it is therefore the case that every thing, no matter how apparently small or static, is spiritual and vitalized: "Whatever is, is a *Spirit*, whether it be only fundamentally so as a dead man is a man, or whether it be also formally and really so, as is a *Soul*, an *Angel*, *God*." <sup>65</sup> Even stones and minerals are merely fallow life: "A stone is a part of the Great World, as of the whole, and is a right true living member in the body of the Great World." <sup>66</sup>

Christian Lurianic Kabbalah embraces the kabbalistic system of the worlds, in which the lowest three, *Beri'ah*, *Yezirah* and *Asiyyah*, are stratifications of the continuum upon which created being is founded. <sup>67</sup> *Asiyyah*, or the world of fabrication, is that stratum of the continuum where what is called matter exists: that is, where those spirits more subordinated, less vitalized, are ordered into collections called bodies. For any particular creature, its outward body is said to be in the realm of *Asiyyah*; and the grade of vitality which its corporeal spirits possess is termed *nefesh*, also after the kabbalists. <sup>68</sup> *Yezirah*, or the world of formation, is that stratum of spirits which are the immediate active principles or entelechies of the bodies of *Asiyyah*; and their grade of vitality is termed *ru'ah*, which means spirit: more specifically, the central ruling and ordering spirit of a creature, its principle of

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<sup>64</sup> OH, I, 92; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36r.

<sup>65</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Paradoxal Discourses*, part I, p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> See *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 14: "[It] is expressly concluded by us, that there is... a systeme of separate *Beings*, which comprehendeth the *Briatick*, the *Jezirathick* and the *Asiathick*, *Isaiah* 43 v. 7." See also *Seder Olam*, section 42: "All this is expressly confirmed by Testimony of Scripture itself *Isaiah* 43 v. 7. Every one that is called in my Name have I created, formed and made: and consequently, according to these words of Scripture, the Hebrews call the World of Creation *Briah*, the World of Formation *Jezirah*, and the World of Fabrication *Asiah*."

<sup>68</sup> See *Seder Olam*, section 41: "The life and spirits of the external Body are termed by the name *Nephesh*... *Nephesh* of the World of Fabrication."



motion.<sup>69</sup>

The transmission of causal order from the active principle, or central spirit, of a creature to its passive principle, or body, is likened to a radiation of vitality: one which proceeds from the active stratum of *Yezirah* to the passive one of *Asiyyah*, pervading all the body in the sense that every one of the corporeal aggregate of *nefesh* spirits are "touched" by the causality of the central *ru'ah* spirit. Hence, in effect, *Asiyyah* is said to have arisen out of *Yezirah*, as fabricated bodies arise out of, are the effect of, their formative central spirits:

The *Jeziratick* World, from whence (as from its root) the *Asiatick* World proceeded, penetrates and pervades the whole *Asiatick* World in every part, with its vital and essential Rays.<sup>70</sup>

In the sense that the central spirit of *Yezirah*, by subordinating the *nefesh* spirits of *Asiyyah*, extends itself spatially and takes on a corporeal aspect, van Helmont says: "*Nephesh* is the cloathing or Vehicle of the *Ruach*."<sup>71</sup>

But on the continuum of created nature, active spirits are yet passive in relation to spirits higher up the order: that is, the *ru'ah* spirits of *Yezirah* are not only the active principles of bodies of *nefesh* spirits in *Asiyyah*, but are also the passive spirits aggregated into the bodies of higher souls. These bodies in *Yezirah* are not the usual material ones of the realm of *Asiyyah* but "this *Ruach* is a certain Subtile and Spiritual Body, of which sort are the Bodies of Angels."<sup>72</sup> The active principles of these subtle bodies in *Yezirah* are themselves assigned their own stratum called *Beri'ah* or the

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<sup>69</sup> See *ibid.*: "The Spirit pertains to the World of Formation... This Spirit by the *Hebrews* is called *Ruach*." See also *Principles*, p. 51: "The Hebrew word *ruach*, which means spirit, also signifies air. And because air has such swift motion, all the swiftness of motion is attributed to the spirit which is in a moving body."

<sup>70</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 45.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, section 41.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, section 42.

world of creation, and their grade of vitality is *neshamah*.<sup>73</sup> And in the same way that central *ru'ah* spirits in *Yezirah* "cloathe themselves" in the *nefesh* spirits of *Asiyyah*, the stratum passive in relation to their own, so the *neshamah* souls in *Beri'ah* clothe themselves in the *ru'ah* spirits of *Yezirah*.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, as *Yezirah* causally pervades *Asiyyah* with its rays of vitality, so *Beri'ah* pervades *Yezirah*. But since *Yezirah* depends on *Beri'ah* for its vitality, van Helmont says that "the *Briatick* world, by the diffusion of its vital and essential Rays, penetrates the whole *Jeziratick* and *Assiatick* world."<sup>75</sup>

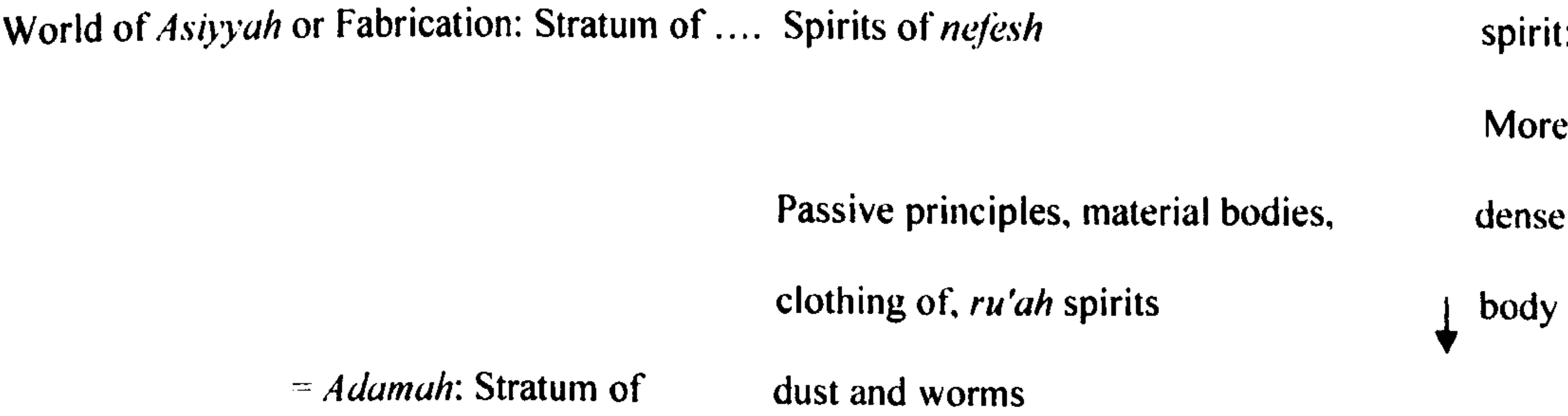
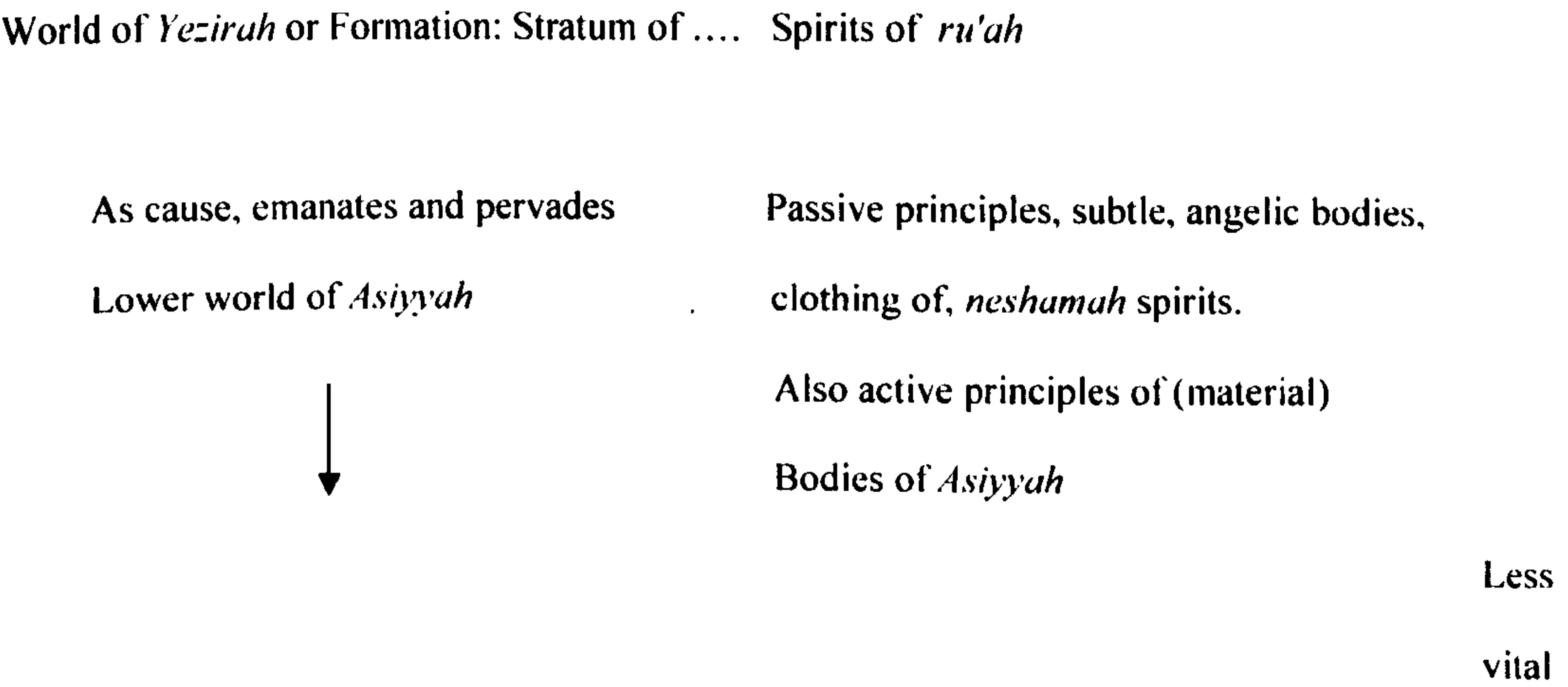
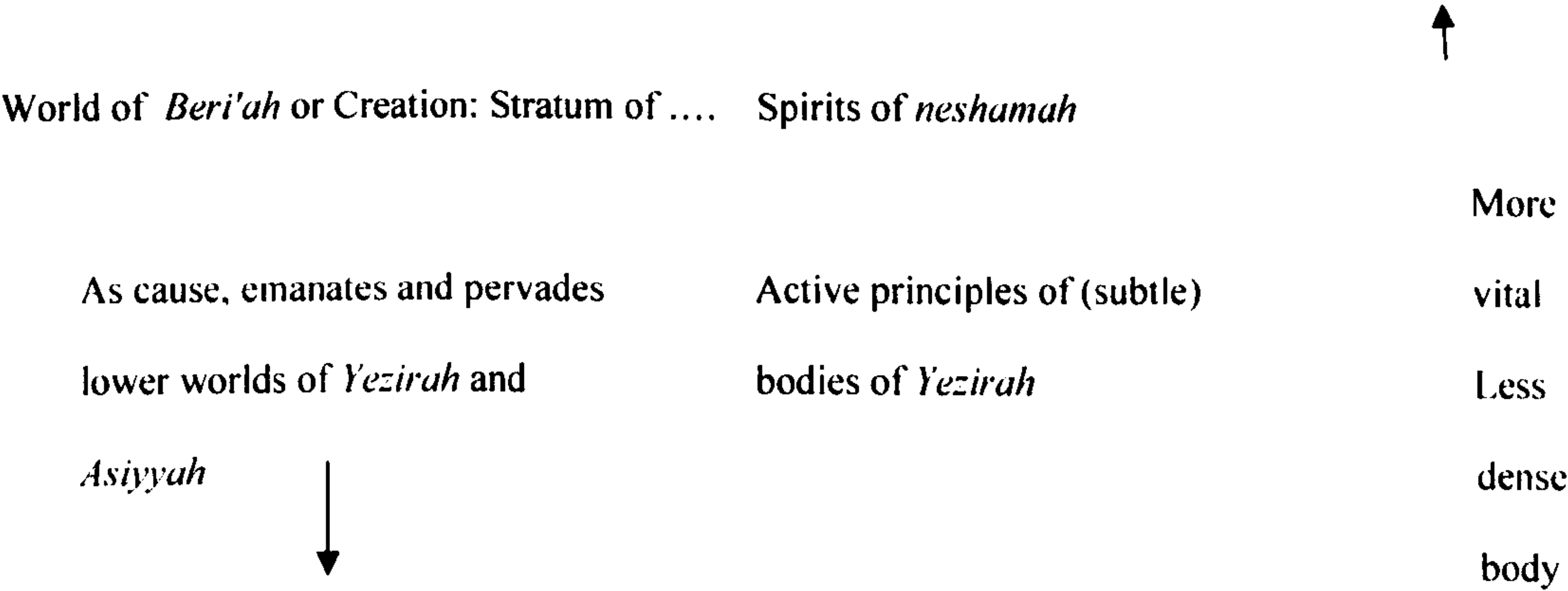
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<sup>73</sup> See *ibid.*, section 41: "The soul which is called *Neshama*, pertains to the World of Creation."

<sup>74</sup> See *ibid.*, section 42: The souls of "men are created in the World of Creation; secondly, formed in the World of Formation (where they assume their Cloathing and Vehicle...".

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, section 45.

The System of the Worlds in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah





It is therefore the case that there is here *one* vitalistic continuum, but which has been divided into three categories: the three kabbalistic worlds of created nature, along with their respective categories of spiritual vitality.

In the draft notes for *Thoughts on Genesis*, van Helmont, though not referring at all to the kabbalistic system of the worlds, mentions "Adamah", which seems to represent the category of *Assiyah*: "Adamah is the complex or assembly of spirits which live in darkness." <sup>76</sup> The "darkness" refers to the devitalization of such spirits as those of *Assiyah*.

Now, the transmission or pervasion of vitality down the continuum, through the three worlds, is in fact the procession of true ideas as they flow from their antecedents according to the rational order of nature. Each spirit is a true idea, and there is an infinity of them in the plenum. In that a certain subject entails certain predicates which logically flow from it, so it is said that a central spirit emanates and rules over a body of other spirits. The extent of any spirit, as active principle subordinating a body of other spirits, in this ideal schematic, is correlate to the extent of the spirit's knowledge:

[Amongst the] *infinite Myriads of Spirits*... there comes to be a *secretion* or *separation* made ... and that of as many degrees, as there are degrees of *Knowledge*, even unto the very last *extremity*, which is the privation thereof... A *Spirit* considered in itself, is, to us, *indefinite*, and its *amplitude*, or *extension* is such and so great, as the degree of its *Knowledge* and *Union* doth admit. <sup>77</sup>

Moving down the worlds of the continuum towards the more passive, less vital, the degree of knowledge diminishes, becomes more deprived, as spirits subsume less but

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<sup>76</sup> OH, I, 125; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 44.

<sup>77</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 15.

are subsumed more. The converse is to be found by moving up the worlds.

The subjective microcosm of a particular creature in this idealism is accordingly a stream of ephemereal thoughts or perceptions that emanate from its enduring central spirit, its fiery or active principle, as predicates logically flow from a concept. This "fire or life (as we find by experience) doth form our very thoughts." <sup>78</sup> The thought, perception, knowledge, that a subject has is its extension, by subordination, over its surrounding spirits. Since each of these spirits is itself a subject with a thought or perception of its own, it can be said that any perception contains a multiplicity of sub-perceptions. And because of the plenum, this multiplicity is in fact infinite. Conway almost certainly has this analysis to mind when she writes that:

All knowledge requires a variety or multitude of things as the subject or receptacle of that knowledge... Thus, when I look at something, I see it with my two eyes... and two things do not appear to me, but one. And if I could see something with ten thousand eyes, just as I see with two, that thing, whether it be a horse or a man, would not appear as anything but one single thing... Consequently, every creature which has any life, sense, or motion must be multiple or numerous; indeed, from the perspective of every created intellect, it must be numerous without number or infinite. <sup>79</sup>

In Kabbalah, knowledge, or the degree of it, is also to be found as one of the attributes used to distinguish the three worlds. Whereas *nefesh* spirits of *Asiyyah* have only a basic animal vitality, *neshamah* souls of *Beri'ah* have rationality and therefore *a priori* knowledge. The *ru'ah* spirits of *Yezirah*, though themselves the souls of bodies, and therefore of a higher rank in the rational order of nature than basic *nefesh* vitality, do not possess rational knowledge. They, therefore, seem to be of a grade between the rational and the animal. The basic animal vitality of *nefesh* is probably best conceived

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<sup>78</sup> *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Principles*, pp. 54-55.



as relatively blind or unconscious action. Clearly the distinction of the worlds by degrees of vitality also applies to the degrees of knowledge. On the continuum, proceeding towards the "lower end" of *Asiyyah*, as vitality ever diminishes but never ceases in absolute passivity, so knowledge must likewise ever diminish but not cease entirely. Proceeding towards the "upper end" of *Beri'ah*, the unceasing increase in vitality must be accompanied with an unceasing increase in knowledge. Indeed many kabbalists saw the rational understanding of the universe as a religious apprehension of God, which underlies the essential neo-Platonism of kabbalistic cosmology.<sup>80</sup>

### 1.3.2 The Creation of the Cosmos

#### *The Meaning of "Creation"*

The meaning of "creation" in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah is that of the *instantiation* of individual substances, understood as a contrast and opposition to the notion of *modification*. The modification of an already existent substance is but a change (of the attributes) of that substance, and is not the creation or inception of a new substance. Mere modification of the divine substance is pantheism; pantheism and creation are mutually exclusive concepts. Creation must be the effecting of a substance by another, and which effect is a separate being from the one which is its cause. Now, all beings which depend on some other as the cause for their existence are precisely what are called creatures: they are created, or subsist by virtue of some other being. Only that mode of being which depends on no other, is an uncreated

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<sup>80</sup> See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 155.



being: it is not a creature but a creator. Such a self-subsistent being is a necessary substance, and accordingly, as the effect of no other, has nothing of effect in it: rather, as cause of all other beings, it is pure unlimited cause, what van Helmont calls "an infinite efficient":

*Creation, properly so call'd, [is] the effection of an infinite efficient, whereby a separable Being is constituted, or made. This definition of Active Creation, may also be easily applied to Passive Creation; or to that which is Relative, that is, to that respect which the Creator hath to the Creature.*<sup>81</sup>

Creatures neither are, nor can subsist of themselves; for could they subsist of, or from themselves, then would they no longer be Creatures, but Creatours.<sup>82</sup>

The instantiation of the creature by the creator is of a causal nature, and is the reification of an idea in God's mind into that of a separable substance. A spirit substance is created causally *from* or *by* God; it is not made *out of* a spatial portion of the divine substance, for it is an ideal entity, not a corporeal one extended in space. The *Cabbalistical Dialogue* uses the Latin particles *ab* (from or by) and *ex* (out of) to draw this distinction:

The Particle (*ex*) *out of* does only denote or properly belong to *matter*; nor can it Properly belong to *Spirit*; which yet is the most proper Subject of *Creation*, properly so called: and of this (*Spirit*) it can no wise be said, that it is, or is not (*Ex*) *out of* another, but only that it is (*ab*) or *from* another: just as we say, not that an Idea or conception is made *out of* the Soul, or *out of* the Mind, but *from* the Soul, or *from* the Mind.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> *Spirit of Diseases*, section 3.

<sup>83</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 3.

Thus, in answer to the question, how "will the Effect be posterior to, or after its cause?", the answer is: "In the order of Nature, though not in the order of Time", meaning the logical causal order of nature.<sup>84</sup>

This creative instantiation, the details of which will soon be laid out, as the causal transmission of a reifying truth from the necessary substance to certain of its thoughts, is referred to by van Helmont as a production by the power or spirit of God:

For as much therefore as this most Perfect Being doth produce and create all things, it is evident from hence that the word *to create*, cannot import the production of a thing out of nothing, but out of, or by the Power or Spirit of this most Perfect Being, which we call God. Now this Power or Spirit of God, or whether it be called his Command or Will, is Essential.<sup>85</sup>

The type of creation envisioned in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah is *emanation*. Creatures originated in the substance of God where they pre-existed as his ideas. They passed to the status of independent substances when they were causally instantiated. The important point to be made now is that these individuals *pre-existed*: which is thus a rejection of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Throughout the Helmontiana explicit denials of this doctrine are to be met with. In the *Cabbalistical Dialogue* several pages are devoted to this end. The point is made that the notion that something can come out of nothing is a logical contradiction:

As, To be, and not to be, dose imply a contradiction, so it is a consequent of this contradiction, *out of* Not-being, to be; if we should speak accurately, and according to the Laws of the Essential Descriptions of Causes.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Spirit of Diseases*, section 5.

<sup>86</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 11.



In the *Paradoxical Discourses*, that creatures "sprang and came of nothing" is rejected because this would require either that God, as creator, contains an hiatus, some nothingness, in him; or, that he first create some nothingness, from which creatures might be produced. The first is impossible because God, as the infinite substance, cannot possibly have a void of being in him: "This cannot be, because by this means, a nothing must be conceived to be in God: whereas indeed he is the Eternal Being of all Beings...". The second is simply absurd, it is "a contradiction, because a Nothing cannot be made, but whatever is made or is, must be something."<sup>87</sup> Indeed, as the *Spirit of Diseases* states, the theory of *creatio ex nihilo*, as an absurd illogicality, necessarily fails as an explanation:

If *to create* signifies the Production of a thing out of nothing, then is it an absolutely unintelligible expression, neither can any man know what is meant by it, because no thought or conception can be framed of nothing; whereas the use of words is to convey to us the signification and understanding of things, whereof they are the marks and indications.<sup>88</sup>

The explanation of creation should rather be that of emanation: creatures were uninstantiated ideas of God for which the term "creation" stands for their passage into instantiation, into creatures, in the logical order of nature: what is repeatedly referred to as "the visible coming out of the invisible":

It is manifest... that what is essential in all things was in God without beginning, so that by the word *Create* cannot be understood, that God should bring forth new Beings, which were not in God without beginning... Whence therefore follows that *the word Create betokens the bringing forth, or production of something, out of the invisible into open view to be seen and perceived.*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Paradoxal Discourses*, part 2, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> *Spirit of Diseases*, section 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Divine Being*, section 27. See also *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 7: "Scripture also contradicts this false and inconsistent signification of this word [*creatio ex nihilo*]; for it expressly teacheth us, that *to create, is to produce something visible, out of that which is spiritual or invisible.*" In the Lexicon



The account of creation given in the *Zohar* and nearly all other kabbalistic writings that God expanded himself outwards into space when he made the world was rejected by Isaac Luria on the grounds that, since God was the infinite being, it made no sense to speak of his expanding into a new realm which was not already a part of him.

Developing an idea he had discovered in a thirteenth century treatise, Luria located the creation process where it could only be located when all existence was that of an infinite being, namely *in that being*.<sup>90</sup> And since creation means the instantiation of what is not God, or at least what can be distinguished from him in some way, then that event internal to God must at the same time be an alteration of the divine substance. The *zimzum*, as the conception of a contraction or withdrawal of the divine substance at some point in God, is accordingly an attempt to re-schematize the creative process purged of its previous illogicalities. In the *Adumbratio*, the Cabbalist says that "this very contraction of himself [God] is the formal means of immediate creation";<sup>91</sup> and Conway writes:

For the sake of his creatures (so that there might be a place for them) he diminished the highest degree of his intense light. Thus a place arose, like an empty circle, a space for worlds.<sup>92</sup>

But there is another aspect to the bifurcation served by the *zimzum*, which is of an epistemological kind, though, given the idealism of this cosmology, is easily seen to be implicit in it. And this concerns the nature of God as the infinite substance. What is infinite, that is, undifferentiated and so without the attributes of space and time,

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of the *Kabbala Denudata* (I, I, 665) under the entry for "contractio", von Rosenroth writes: "When the infinite God wished to send forth the things destined to emanate, He contracted himself in the centre of His light, so that this most intense of all lights withdrew into itself toward the sides and toward a sort of circumference".

<sup>90</sup> See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 260.

<sup>91</sup> P. 6.

<sup>92</sup> *Principles*, p. 10.

cannot meaningfully be conceived to expand and create the world in this way, since "expansion" is a concept inapplicable to a being without spatio-temporal differentiation. In the same way, such a being is also *incomprehensible*: we only know (things) by virtue of space and time: the infinite undifferentiated being is necessarily beyond, inaccessible and invisible to, the comprehension of finite beings. And what cannot be thought of, can even less be uttered: thus the oft-repeated assertion by mystics, the kabbalists included, that God is ineffable. This aspect of God as unknowable and hidden has a special name in Kabbalah: *Ein-Sof*; and there the epistemological gulf that separates creature from creator is further transformed into a metaphysical transcendence of *Ein-Sof* to the world. This notion becomes fundamental in kabbalistic creation theory, which is hinted at by Conway:

According to the Hebrews, the infinite God, whom they call *Aensoph*, is said to exist outside the place of the world because a creature could not comprehend the immensity of his light.<sup>93</sup>

But for all his unknowability, due to his infinity, his existence cannot be denied, for he is the ground and origin of being, the creator, and there "must be" a creator. This creator, or God (Jehovah), is thus known only through the manifestation of his power (or through "*Elohim*") . As van Helmont says in the draft notes to *Thoughts on Genesis*, Jehovah is "the first ineffable name; because *Elohim* is the executor of Jehova in bodies or creatures, the strength of Jehova is not known to us except through creatures."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 18. See also p. 10: "[Creatures] could in no way endure the very great intensity of his light. These words of Scripture apply to this: 'God dwells in inaccessible light. No one has ever seen him, etc.' (1 Timothy 6:16)".

<sup>94</sup> OH, I, 103; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 39.



So the *zimzum* notion is both that of metaphysical distinction: God and world as substance undifferentiated and differentiated; and that of epistemological distinction: God and world as what cannot be and what can be an object of knowledge. Amongst certain of the kabbalists the *creatio ex nihilo* theory was re-interpreted according to this epistemological distinction. The *nihilo* now stood for the nothingness of what is incomprehensible, i.e. that realm which cannot be an object of knowledge, but which nevertheless precedes the things of the world in the ontological order of nature. Indeed, this version of "nothingness", *Ayin* in Hebrew, was, by some, even asserted to be a manifestation of the infinite hidden *Ein-Sof*: beyond the world of things, one "sees" *Ayin*, the, albeit negative, closest glimpse one can have of the *Ein-Sof*.<sup>95</sup> But this aspect of the preparatory creative event of *zimzum* is never explicitly developed by the Sulzbach-Ragley kabbalists; and they never seek to re-interpret the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, but only to refute it in its standard conception.

### *The Creative Event*

In Lurianic Kabbalah, the *zimzum* is the conception of the separating of the intensity of the substance of God. Where God withdraws, a "space" arises, albeit one which is of infinitesimal size in relation to God, and which is called *tehiru* by the kabbalists. The divine substance is both within and without the *tehiru*: outside it, it is still that of the infinite unlimited and undivided substance of *Ein-Sof*, which the kabbalists assert to be unchanged by the *zimzum*, as an immutable being should be; inside, the *tehiru* is

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<sup>95</sup> See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 94; and Daniel Matt, "*Ayin*: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism", in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, edited by Lawrence Fine (New York: NYUP, 1995), pp. 67-108.



still filled by the divine substance, but the withdrawal of the infinity of *Ein-Sof* leaves a substance of mere finite, limited or diminished intensity, a sort of "precipitation" or "residue". The Hebrew term for this residue is "*reshimu*"; and this first precipitation of *Ein-Sof* is called the vessel of Primordial Air, or *Avir Kadmon*. Though some kabbalists, including Hayyim Vital, denied that the *tehiru* contained a residual plenum of the divine substance immediately following the *zimzum*, this was the belief of Luria himself, and certainly seems to have been that which Christian Lurianic Kabbalah took over.<sup>96</sup> In the *Kabbala Denudata*, von Rosenroth refers to the oft used kabbalistic analogy for the *zimzum* as the emptying of a bottle of fragrance:

That evacuation of the Jews [the *tehiru*] is to be explained not as if that space in God were completely a vacuum, but that the most glorious abundance of the infinite light was there diminished, as when fragrance is not completely taken away but is at least diminished, as when a glass full of fragrant oil is emptied.<sup>97</sup>

And Conway writes:

This void was not privation or non-being but an actual place of diminished light, which... filled this entire space... was united with the entire divine light, which remained in the void to a lesser degree, so that it could be tolerated.<sup>98</sup>

According to the Lurianic kabbalists one of the essences of the divine being was Judgement, or *Din* in Hebrew, meaning limitation or differentiation, and this was especially responsible for the creative process, both for the separation of *Ein-Sof* into

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<sup>96</sup> See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>97</sup> *Kabbala Denudata*, I, 2, 89. See also *ibid.*, p. 150: "God contracted his presence to create the worlds, which space is called primaeval Air. In this remained vestiges of the divine light, which also are called the primaeval Air."

<sup>98</sup> *Principles*, pp. 10-11.

*Ein-Sof* and *reshimu*, in the *zimzum* event, but also for the differentiation of the *reshimu* itself into individual constituents. As Scholem puts it:

The essence of the Divine Being, before the *Tsimtsum* took place, contained not only the qualities of love and mercy, but also that of Divine Sternness which the kabbalists call *Din* or Judgement... In the act of *Tsimtsum*, however, [*Din*] crystallized and became clearly defined, for inasmuch as *Tsimtsum* signifies an act of negation and limitation it is also an act of judgment. It must be remembered that to the kabbalist, judgment means the imposition of limits and the correct determination of things.<sup>99</sup>

Following the *zimzum* existence is, then, conceived to be separated into two: on the one hand there is the universal substance in finite mode, i.e. differentiated into a multiplicity, and on the other, the same substance, yet infinite, undifferentiated and one. The relationship between the one (*Ein-Sof*) and the many (*reshimu*), especially given their commonality of substance, accords to that relationship between the perceiver and perceived. Thoughts or perceptions do not occur where there are no individuals, and there are no individuals where there is no differentiation: thus, in this cosmological idealism, the *zimzum* represents the transition from a non-thinking existence to one where such does occur. The *zimzum* is the emergence of God as the (universal) thinking being: the bifurcation of existence into that of single perceiver on the one hand and multiple perceptions on the other. *Ein-Sof* is the perceiver, the *tehiru* is the "realm" or "container" of the totality of his thoughts, and is, so it seems to me, the mind of God.

It has to be said that the nature of this first immediate precipitation of the *zimzum* is barely, if at all, discussed in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, and not much more so by the Jewish kabbalists themselves. However, my interpretation that this initial *reshimu*

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<sup>99</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 263.



equates to the mind of God will be seen to be the only viable one when the very next stage in the creative process is examined, namely the exercising of God's will as the actual instantiation of creaturely substances. For the account given of the freedom of God's will by the Sulzbach-Ragley kabbalists hinges on his wisdom being *prior* to his will, hence his mind must already be established.

Now, the thoughts which belong to God must be true: they must flow from, or indubitably follow from, his necessary substance. A true thought is a possible real being, or an idea which God might choose to create. The total collection of thoughts is a possible universe of creatures which God might create. Indeed, the only restriction on what God can (*in hypothesis*) create, is that the idea of it, either as a singular possible creature or, as a universe of creatures, does not suffer from logical contradiction. As Conway writes: "God can do anything which does not imply a contradiction."<sup>100</sup> That both the individual creature and the universe pre-existed as ideas in God's mind prior to their creation is stated explicitly throughout various Christian-kabbalistic texts. For example in *The Divine Being*:

God had all things essentially in him before the Creation, and that he can in no wise be *omniscient*, but by having the Ideas, (or that which is essential) of all things in him, and consequently that all things did not then first obtain their Beings, in their Creation, but were all before the creation essentially in God.<sup>101</sup>

Van Helmont, in his Explication to chapter 1 of *Thoughts on Genesis*, says of the opening lines of the Bible: "When, therefore, the time of [the world's] production was

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<sup>100</sup> *Principles*, p. 16.

<sup>101</sup> Section 15. See also *Paradoxal Discourses*, part 2, p. 1: "The Creator of all Beings, before the foundation of the world, and before ever they were brought forth, had and contained the same in his mind and wisdom, even the little world as well as the greater."; and see *Principles*, p. 10: "In God there is an idea which is his image or the word existing within himself, which in substance or essence is one and the same with him, through which he knows himself as well as all other things and, indeed, all creatures were made or created according to this very idea or word."



come, [God] conceived it IN THE HEAD, or central principle of the mind, by thought or thinking." <sup>102</sup> And, in the draft notes, he offers a kabbalistic interpretation of the first three words of the Bible. "*Bereshit bara Elohim*", usually translated as "In the beginning God created" is re-interpreted as "In the head God created", by extracting "*rosch*", meaning "the head", out of "*reshit*". <sup>103</sup>

In Lurianic Kabbalah descriptions like the "'roots of divine judgement' subsist in chaotic mixture with the residue of divine light", <sup>104</sup> or "the power of *Din* that was left in primordial space... was intermingled in a confused fashion with the remnants of the light of *Ein-Sof*...this inchoate mixture", <sup>105</sup> indicate an unordered and undeveloped *reshimu*. This is applicable to the interpretation of the *reshimu* as the ideas of possible creatures and universes existing in the mind of God in an as yet *unchosen* undecided infinite multiplicity.

In the next stage of the creative process, according to Lurianic kabbalah, a ray of light from *Ein-Sof* enters the vessel of *Avir Kadmon*, the unordered *reshimu*. In the Lexicon of the *Kabbala Denudata* von Rosenroth wrote:

Around the evacuated place, for the worlds had not yet come forth, the *light of the infinite* itself was encircling, and then the light was let into the *space*; but this light of the infinite flowed into the space by a certain rarefied line or channel. And that light is the *Emanative Principle* and emits (or gushes out and is the source of Emanation). <sup>106</sup>

This light ray is "a 'cosmic measure' or *kav ha-middah*, that is, the power of formation and organization", which enters the inchoate mixture of the *reshimu* and imposes order on it, causing a second precipitation or crystallization of that residue of divine

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<sup>102</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>103</sup> OH, I, 82; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35: "*Bara creavit Be in, Rosch capite*".

<sup>104</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 263.

<sup>105</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 130.

<sup>106</sup> I, I, 146.

light left by the *zimzum*.<sup>107</sup> Since the organizing ray is itself of the light of the divinity, the event clearly involves no other substance than that of the divine one, and is, indeed, but an interplay of different modes of it: The *reshimu* is God as object; and the ray is God as subject. I have already suggested that the bifurcation of the *zimzum* be interpreted as that of perceiver and perceived. This ordering of the *reshimu*, (the divine light as object), is accordingly that of the ordering of the perceptions or ideas of God. But these multiple (indeed, infinite) possible combinations of ideas in God's mind is a very miasma, where an unlimited number of universes (or combinations of ideas) all have equal rational validity, but whose co-existence is certainly irrational. Thus the ordering of the *reshimu* of ideas in God's mind necessitates the elimination of this co-existence of multiple total idea combinations: or, a principle of selection is needed. The ray from *Ein-Sof*, or the divine light as subject, as the orderer of this miasmatic *reshimu*, is, thus, this principle of selection: is *God's will*.

That God thinks first then acts; that, in the creative process, his mind precedes his will, is made quite explicit in the discussion of the freedom of the divine will by van Helmont and Conway. They reject the notion that freedom of will is indifferent action, i.e. action not determined by the knowledge of the states consequential on the act. To act without fore-knowledge of the consequences is to will out of ignorance, out of mere finite wisdom, a willing not available to God, since his wisdom is infinite. God knows all the consequences of all his possible actions. Thus: "God doth all things according to his infinite Wisdom, therefore there is no indifference of Will in him."<sup>108</sup> Conway writes:

It is possible utterly to refute and eliminate that indifference of the will which the Scholastics and those falsely called Philosophers believe to be in God and

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<sup>107</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 130.

<sup>108</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 2.



which they incorrectly call free will... That indifference of acting or not acting can in no way be said to be in God, for this would be an imperfection and... [God would act] from pure will but without any true and solid reason or the guidance of wisdom.<sup>109</sup>

Accordingly, there must be a principle which serves to determine a specific course of action for God's selecting from amongst the "miasmatic" multiplicity in God's mind; and such a principle must be an essential attribute of God, since he is the creator. This essence of God which determines his will turns out to be his omnibenevolence: God "must do whatever he does... since his infinite wisdom, goodness, and justice are a law to him which cannot be superseded."<sup>110</sup>

Though God's will is necessitated by certain of his essences, it is still "free". Both van Helmont and Conway define freedom as not being determined by *another* being, and so, since God is an autonomous and uncreated being, whatever he does wholly originates in him:

The will of God is most free so that whatever he does... is done without any external force or compulsion or without any cause coming from the creatures (since he is free and acts spontaneously in whatever he does).<sup>111</sup>

Hence, "in all things [God] doth, he is a necessary Agent, and yet also the most free Agent".<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Principles*, p. 15.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 16. See also, p. 13: "God is infinitely good, loving, and bountiful; indeed he is goodness and charity itself, the infinite fountain and ocean of goodness, charity, and bounty."

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>112</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 2. See also, *Principles*, p. 16: "God is both a most free agent and a most necessary one."



## *The Creation of the Plenum and of Creatures*

The kabbalistic account of creation is presented using elaborate imagery, and this is continued beyond the initial creative act, the *zimzum*, for which it is necessary that I now give some account.

In Lurianic Kabbalah, the *zimzum* produced out of the divine substance a first precipitation or *reshimu* called the vessel of *Avir Kadmon*. This precipitation is then ordered or clarified by a ray of light which enters it from *Ein-Sof*, "a raising and lowering of the 'cosmic measure'", after which it is called the vessel of *Adam Kadmon*.<sup>113</sup> The same production of *Adam Kadmon*, as a secondary precipitation, produced by the divine ray of light, the cosmic measure, is also to be found in Christian Lurianic kabbalism:

For as the Infinite God is said to have made a space by his contraction... there is some vestige left behind in that space, which will be the subject and as it were a vessel for all the light poured in there, out of which was produced your first Adam.<sup>114</sup>

Van Helmont and Conway equate Jesus Christ to this *Adam Kadmon*. Conway writes that the space created by the *zimzum* "was the soul of the Messiah, called *Adam Kadmon* by the Hebrews, who filled this entire space."<sup>115</sup> Van Helmont refers to "Christ the Heavenly Adam" repeatedly in the *Seder Olam*.<sup>116</sup> In the draft notes to

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<sup>113</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 130.

<sup>114</sup> *Adumbratio*, p. 26. See also p. 12: "Concerning this first Adam our men [kabbalists] accordingly say: with the contraction of the infinite having been made, the first space arose, and this very space and place of producing the worlds was as it were the very substance of the first man, in which he assuredly received the determination of his being."

<sup>115</sup> *Principles*, p. 10.

<sup>116</sup> See *Seder Olam* sections 11, 12, 15, 23, etc. In the *Adumbratio*, p. 6, the Christian says: "And in that space of yours, at first, the soul of the Messiah is produced, which was of so great a size that it occupied all this space... The Divine light shared itself, by flowing out, which with our followers is

*Thoughts on Genesis* the term "*Elohim*", which is frequently used, is explicitly identified by van Helmont with *Adam Kadmon*, the Messiah and the spiritual universe: "Elohim corresponds to Adam: Adam Kadmon... Elohim is the Messiah."<sup>117</sup>

In chapter 3 of the *Adumbratio*, the correspondences between Christ and *Adam Kadmon* are expounded at great length. The *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, as *reshimu*, is of the divine substance; and, as that *ordered reshimu*, displays distinguishable attributes. Since these are the products of God's will, a determination founded on essential attributes of God's being (e.g. judgement, goodness, wisdom), they must themselves be the divine attributes: what the kabbalists call "*sefirot*". *Adam Kadmon* is, thus, the *one* divine substance, but now conceived under a *multiplicity* of attributes (or *sefirot*). In the *Adumbratio*, the kabbalist says:

Our First Adam is moreover divided into ten enumerations [the *sefirot*]... which, as they are causally and eminently in the first cause, so they are said to be contained ideally and exemplarily in him.<sup>118</sup>

The nature of each *sefirah* as it appears in *Adam Kadmon* is then set out. The Christian then replies that "Ten similar measures are also severally attributed of the Messiah."

In this *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, the *Ein-Sof*, previously ineffable and unknowable by virtue of being infinite or without particular attributes, is now revealed through the distinguishing *sefirot*: hence *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah is a manifestation or image of

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called the Divine Nature of the Messiah. And indeed that which is called by you Adam Kadmon, is called by us Christ."

<sup>117</sup> OH, I, 84; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35: "Elohim respondet Adamo: Adam Kadmon... Elohim est Messias."

<sup>118</sup> p. 14, 15.



God. The *Adumbratio* interprets the quotations from John: "Who sees me, sees the Father", and "Who sees me, sees him who sent me", in this way.<sup>119</sup>

The *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, as essentially a determined set of ideas in God's mind, stands in a passive relation to God by virtue of being an effect of his will. As passive principle, analogies of hypostatical union can be found applied to the relationship of God and *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah. Hence the passive principle of *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah is referred to as the body of the divine active principle as soul: "Christ is... as it were a certain Body for the Divinity."<sup>120</sup> The passive principle of *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah is also referred to as the begotten of the divine active principle as begetter: "It is said of the Messiah in the Gospel that he is the *only born, who* (is produced) *of the Father*, John 1 v. 14."<sup>121</sup> And the passive principle of *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah is also referred to as the instrument of the divine active principle as agent: "Adam Kadmon is the instrument and medium for all subsequent principles."<sup>122</sup>

This determined set of divine ideas, *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, is, in its totality, the macrocosm: the entire universe as ideal prototype in God: "Elohim [Adam Kadmon]... is the glorious spiritual universe."<sup>123</sup> The universe as ideal prototype in the single substance of the *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah is attributed to the highest grade in the ontological strata of the kabbalistic system of the worlds: that of *Azilut*:

There is understood another World, more noble, and (in the order of Nature), more antient than the rest, immediately flowing from the Author, God himself, called in Hebrew *Aziluth*, which signifies the Nearest to the most

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 25.

<sup>121</sup> *Adumbratio*, p. 8.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>123</sup> OH, I, 84; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35: "Elohim... estque universum spirituale gloriosum."



high and supreme God himself, and this cannot agree to any other than Christ.  
<sup>124</sup>

This state of the universe is that only of the *ideas* of all things to come, not conceived as separate substances in themselves, but only as perceptions emanated of the one and only divine substance:

But as the *Aziluthick*, as it is the noblest of all, so it is the greatest, and but only one; altho' the *Hebrews* distinguish it into ten Emanations; the distinction of which Emanations, nevertheless is only modal and not essential. <sup>125</sup>

Now, the light ray which entered the original *reshimu*, produced the *Adam Kadmon* not only by virtue of its imposing order, but also by increasing the "density" of that vestigial light:

At God's command the final *yod* of the Name [the light ray from *Ein-Sof*] descended and blended a somewhat denser light into the first air, for the worlds had not been able to come forth in that place because of the excessive fineness of the light which abounded there. <sup>126</sup>

I would suggest that this increased densification can be interpreted in terms of idealistic rationalism as that "hardening", that making concrete, that is associated with the notion of *making actual*. Into the inchoate *reshimu*, which I have argued equates to the realm of all possible ideas of things in God's mind, the light ray descends, which is the will of God determining on one set of ideas, the truth of which flows from the attribute of his goodness, and which truth bestows reality on the ideas of the things so selected. God's will, this ray of light from *Ein-Sof*, thus both orders the *reshimu* and densifies its vestigial ideal contents into concrete actual substances. The

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<sup>124</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 43.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, section 44.

<sup>126</sup> *Kabbala Denudata*, 1, 2, 150.

*Adam Kadmon*/Messiah is accordingly the universe of infinite things, conceived to exist not only as an infinity of true ideas, as intelligible universe in passive relation to its emanating divine perceiver, but also as infinity of actual substances (or spirits or monads), each of which, as substance, is an active principle itself.

Now, for these entities to be active, there must be others which stand in a passive relationship to them, in order to confer the status of active principle, or substance, on them. In my exposition of the nature of the created world as conceived in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, creatures consist of nothing but configurations of spirits, and the fundamental attributes of soul and body are, at bottom, given only in terms of the causal relations that hold between these spirits. Specifically, one spirit, as cause, is the soul or active principle of a multiplicity of spirits, as effect, body or passive principle. Thus, if those infinite ideas of things in *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah are at the same time to be considered as substances, then, as active principles, whose very notion depends on having relations with other substances which stand in a passive relationship to them, then these substances must simultaneously have relations amongst themselves. Since inter-substantial relations precisely constitute what it is to be a creature, it follows that creatures must be co-existent with that very plenum of substances called *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah. Therefore, when the will of God, as the ray of light, produces the *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, the determined universe existing both as infinity of ideas and as infinity of substances, it will, at the same time, produce an infinity of creatures. Creation, therefore, as the production by God of active principles additional to himself, by his bestowing of his power into ideas of possible substances to make them actual, at the same time necessitates the production of creatures, since these are precisely those inter-substantial relations without which



there would be no possibility of activity or exercise of power by the said spirits. As

*The Divine Being* states:

The word *Create* [signifies]... *the putting of the Beings or Spirits into their proper states, or the imparting of such qualities, or such capacities unto them, as gives them a power to work of themselves.*<sup>127</sup>

Thus it is that the spirit substances of the plenum are the bases for creatures. Since *Adam Kadmon/Messiah* precisely is this plenum, so he is said to be both a medium for the production of creatures, and the vessel within which they are all contained. In the *Adumbratio* it says:

And it is through his son [the Messiah], that whatever is in the Heaven or in the Earth, whatever is observed, and whatever is not observed... All things were created through him and in him.<sup>128</sup>

On the one hand, inasmuch as the souls of creatures are single spirits of the plenum of *Adam Kadmon/Messiah*, whose ontological stratum is that of the divine world of *Azilut*, where these souls have an existence as *ideas* in God's mind, van Helmont says that: "The souls of men have not their first being in this world, but do come into this World out of another."<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, inasmuch as souls, as the active principles or efficient causes of creatures, are spirit *substances* in *Adam Kadmon/Messiah*, so in the *Adumbratio* the Cabbalist says: "The first Adam... is the most perfect efficient cause of all things."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Section 27.

<sup>128</sup> *Adumbratio*, p. 9. See also *ibid.* p. 6: "Inside the first Adam or Messiah, the remaining creatures were produced, by way of a determined order of distribution."; and see *Principles*, p. 22: "It is said that all things are contained in him [Christ] and have their existence in him, because they arise from him just like branches from a root."; and *Seder Olam*, section 12: "God, by this *medium*, to wit, Christ created and produced all Creatures whatsoever."

<sup>129</sup> *Two Hundred Queries*, questions 157-58.

<sup>130</sup> *Adumbratio*, p. 10.



Now, the bodies of creatures are no more than relations between spirit substances, and since all spirits are derived of the plenum, whether they exist as the passive or active aspect in a particular creature, so bodies too have their origin in the *Adam Kadmon/Messiah*. The plenum, as inexhaustible number of spirits capable of subordination by souls into bodily aggregates, is thus referred by van Helmont to be the single "spiritual watery body" out of which all particular creaturely bodies are derived: "All things, that is, all particular Bodies proceeded from one and the same Principle the Water."<sup>131</sup> Creatures arise out of the spirit plenum of *Adam Kadmon/Messiah* when certain individual spirits enter into a relation with a multiplicity of others: the single spirit as soul or active fiery principle; the group of spirits embraced by it as its body or passive watery principle. This is why Christian Lurianic Kabbalah says that creatures are not produced out of nothing; rather, the emergence of a body, as that aspect of a creature extended in space (and time), is the emergence of a grouping relation between already existing substances. Hence, van Helmont asks "Is not the body confessed by all to be a Praeexistent matter or substance?".<sup>132</sup> All spirit substances, as active principles, by definition must dominate over some other spirits; therefore the soul of every creature, as such a spirit, must always have been in a grouping relation, or always have had a body. Thus the production of a new body can only be an apparent novelty: really it is the entrance into *discernible* extension of a pre-existing spirit grouping previously too small to be detected:

Whence therefore follows that *the word Create betokens the bringing forth, or production of something, out of the invisible into open view to be seen and*

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<sup>131</sup> *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 45.

<sup>132</sup> *Two Hundred Queries*, question 159.

*perceived... The word Create [signifies] the production of the Visible out of the Invisible.*<sup>133</sup>

Out of the plenum of spirit substances, which are the actualized ideas of God, as they exist in the realm of the *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, or the kabbalistic world of *Azilut*, creatures, as configurations of these spirits, are secreted or separated. Though this lower realm of creatures is actually a continuum of the active-passive relationships between spirits, since it originates from the divine end of this continuum, those creatures with the greatest vitality imported to their active principles, take precedence over the less vital, at least in the order of nature. Thus, in terms of the tripartite division of the creaturely continuum into the kabbalistic strata of the lower worlds, it is the *Neshamah* spirits of the world of *Beri'ah* which are created first, and from which, as their passive principles, the *ru'ah* spirits of *Yezirah* flow, followed by the *nefesh* spirits of *Asiyyah*:

And hence it is, that from this World of Creation [*Beri'ah*], other worlds also burst out, to wit, the World of Formation [*Yezirah*]... Lastly, from the Inferiour World of Formation proceeded this World of Fabrication [*Assiyah*].<sup>134</sup>

### *The Origin of Matter*

In the Lurianic account a great deal of detail was afforded to the imagery of "lights" which shone out of *Adam Kadmon* and which were responsible for the production of the creaturely worlds. Out of *Adam Kadmon* "supernal lights were produced, which

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<sup>133</sup> *The Divine Being*, section 27. See also *ibid.* section 26: "So that according to the common use, the word *Produce*, cannot signify anything else, but this, that these things [creatures] that before were invisible, and not knowable, do now become visible and discernible."

<sup>134</sup> *Seder Olam*, sections 38-39.



came forth in five Sefirotic decades... for the production of the lower worlds.<sup>135</sup> To cut a long story short, the lights which shine out of *Adam Kadmon* are derived of the original light ray from *Ein-Sof*, now displayed severally as the distinguished attributes of God (the *sefirot*) as they are manifested in *Adam Kadmon*. Since the attributes are inherent in the spirit plenum of *Adam Kadmon*, the creaturely realm too must manifest these *sefirot*, including its ordering into three worlds. The shining lights, as representing emanative causality, in this sense, produce (the ordered division of) the worlds. But the cosmological process was not over yet. According to Lurianic Kabbalah, this first arrangement of the spirit plenum, the *Adam Kadmon*, was inherently unstable: it was not strong enough to contain the power/light that continues to flow from *Ein-Sof*. The imagery of that light differentiated by sefirotic attribute and manifested in the *Adam Kadmon*, included, as well as the shining lights, vessels for each of those lights, symbolizing the worldly reception of the divine light. At some point part of the structure collapsed and fell back into chaos. In the Lurianic imagery, this was described as the "breaking of the vessels". The vessels associated with the lower seven *sefirot* broke, and the divine light which was formerly collected and dispersed orderly by them, now spewed out chaotically or returned back to *Ein-Sof*.<sup>136</sup> With this loss of the organizing light/power, the spirit substances, along with their dependent creatures, suffered a loss of order and power themselves, and fell away from God: from the infinite source of light, vitality, order, goodness, etc., slipping down the continuum towards the dark, sluggish, anarchic and evil. The three strata of the lower worlds themselves "fell down" the continuum, since their constituent spirits had fallen. Those spirits of the lowest world of *Asiyyah* called

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<sup>135</sup> *Kabbala Denudata*, I, 3, 72.

<sup>136</sup> See *ibid.*, I, 1, 698-700; and Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 138.



*Nefesh*, when they fell, suffered a diminution of vitality such that the bodies they formed took on a discernibly corporeal appearance. Thus was the material world, as we call it, produced.<sup>137</sup>

This version too is followed in the *Adumbratio*; yet in the *Seder Olam*, van Helmont implies that *Asiyyah* never existed until after the Fall, effectively identifying it with matter, rather than a previous grade of spirits which just happened to sink further into that sluggish state we call matter:

But as for this *Asiatick* World, this has its rise and original from the *Jeziratick* World, by reason of some great fall of the Souls contained therein for transgressing the Law of God: And if these Souls had never fell, this *Asiatick* World which is the World of Fabrication, had never existed.<sup>138</sup>

But, contradicting this, the *Seder Olam* also states that this dullness of vitality is ultimately only relative to the world of *Yezirah*/Formation, for no part of *Asiyyah*/Fabrication is absolutely devoid of life. Vitality,

nevertheless is to be understood in comparison to the Superiour Worlds, where indeed the vital principle is far more predominant, than in the inferiour World, nor is this inferiour World in any, even the most stupid part of it wholly, and in every degree deprived of life.<sup>139</sup>

Apart from the *Adumbratio*, the Helmontiana do not refer to the imagery of the breaking of the vessels. However, in *Thoughts on Genesis*, van Helmont is clear about the causes of the Fall. On account of the freedom that substances have, a preference for self-interest arose at the expense of the general harmony. It is as if a localized ordering, which grows and intensifies around a soul, pursuing its own

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<sup>137</sup> See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 162-63.

<sup>138</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 47.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

interests, forms a sphere of influence, a body, which is excessively localized, a densification which

gives rise to the appearance of a bark or cortex surrounding the deviant spirit:

Since they [souls] were in liberty, they indulged too much in their glory and individuality and enjoying this prohibited fruit, turned aside from other things and were enveloped in themselves, and assumed rinds.<sup>140</sup>

But the pursuit of self-interest is at the expense of the general divine order, and is, at the same time, the refusal of a soul to strive to perfection: a substance which deviates thus cannot maintain its vital condition, its sphere of ordering influence, against a macrocosm antithetical to it: it falls down the scale of creaturely perfection, at the same time as it acquires a denser, more corporeal, body. Van Helmont uses the analogy of a rower who rows against the flow and who, when "he does not row and slackens his arms against the flow, is carried off... Substances, disordered in themselves, were covered over and fell."<sup>141</sup>

In the *Cabbalistical Dialogue* the Fall is described as having happened only "for some certain cause or reason", which is not given, though it is the loss of vitality and order in this fall that generates matter:

That some of these Spirits, for some certain cause or reason, are slipt down from the state of knowing, of Penetrating, or of moving into a state of impenetration. That these *Monades* or single *Beings* being now become spiritless or dull, did cling or come together after various manners. That this *coalition* or clinging together, so long as it remains such, is called *matter*.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> OH, I, 86; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35r.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 4.



Before the Fall, or the breaking of the vessels, all the substances of the created worlds were perfect replicas of their ideal counterparts in the *azilutic* world. In this state, the perceptions of souls flowed out of their essences in a true and real fashion, since all those souls, as actualized ideas, were still in perfectly ordered relations to each other as originally established in the divine mind. But with self-envelopment, individual souls became dislocated from the universal order, and the hitherto rational flow of perceptions ceased and was replaced by a localized form of knowledge gathering, based only on each soul's (spatially extended) sphere of influence. This seems to be what van Helmont has in mind when he dicusses the Adam and Eve myth in *Thoughts on Genesis*. God says to Adam and Eve,

That on the day you eat from it [knowledge]... your eyes will be opened, you will receive an external, corporeal sign of things...

The eyes of both were opened, their corporeal eyes that is, so that things were seen corporeally, which before were seen mentally or ideally.<sup>143</sup>

Hence, self-envelopment concerns not only that of localized rulership, the dislocating of an individual from God's general plan, in its pursuit of its private tastes, but also concerns that of localized knowledge gathering, the dislocating from the divine ideal order; both breaks of which manifest as the corporealization of the Fall:

If dreams were guided, we would see all things perfectly. The Fall of Adam was an awakening out of that pleasant and active dream, by which he passes over into this corporeal world.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> OH, I, 119, 117; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 42r.

<sup>144</sup> OH, I, 130; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 81r.

### 1.3.3 Interaction between God, the *Ens Medium* and Creatures

Conway affirms that the "order of things... [is] only three, namely, God as the highest, Christ as the mediator, and the creation as the lowest rank of all".<sup>145</sup> The second, or middle ontological order, Christ or the *Adam Kadmon* or *Elohim*, is the infinity of things of the world, which exist *both* as the (determined) ideas of God's mind, *and* as the (actualized) spirit substances of the created world. The third and lowest order is that of the infinity of creatures, which consist of nothing more than relationships formed between the spirits of the plenum of the second order, and which are, therefore, not substantially different from this second order, but are merely modes of it. Thus:

This creation is one entity or substance in respect to its nature or essence... so that it only varies according to its modes of existence, one of which is corporeality.<sup>146</sup>

Because the spirit basis of the created world is a plenum, relations between spirits can be found both towards the infinitely small and the infinitely large, where the smaller is the less vital and more corporeal, and the larger is more vital and more spiritual. In other words, creatures exist on a continuum, partaking of a degree of spirit and body, but both of which are without limit, i.e. creatures could be found which are ever more spiritual and vital and therefore closer to God, and conversely ever more corporeal and sluggish and further from God:

There are many degrees of [corporeality] so that any thing can approach or recede more or less from the condition of a body or spirit. Moreover, because spirit is the more excellent of the two in the true and natural order of things,

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<sup>145</sup> *Principles*, p. 41.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.



the more spiritual a certain creature becomes... the closer it comes to God, who, as we all know, is the highest spirit. Thus, a body is always able to become more and more spiritual to infinity.<sup>147</sup>

The created world is therefore a continuum; and it is divided into three "worlds" by the kabbalists, of which *Asiyyah* is that degree of corporeality which is discernible as what is commonly called "matter". Each stratum of this cosmological structure (God, *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah/*Elohim*, creature) is, according to Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, both united with and distinguished from the stratum adjacent to it. They speak of "unions", or causal connections, which are, in more theosophical language, the *immanences* of one stratum in another. And they also speak of "distinctions", which are the ontological separations, the *transcendencies*, of one stratum over another. Thus God, by being the cause of the existence of created spirits is said by Conway to be "present in everything most closely and intimately in the highest degree."<sup>148</sup> Van Helmont says the same:

The *Creator* produced first of all *infinite Myriads of Spirits* united to him, and with him, in the supream degree of most happy *perfection* (in which the *Messiah* did still abide) so that *God* might be *all in all*.<sup>149</sup>

The Messiah, as the totality of all such created spirits, is thereby also in a union with God, and in one which, like that of the soul and the body, is hypostatical: "Jesus Christ... is eternally in God and perpetually united to him so that [he] is his vehicle and organ, just like the body in respect to the soul".<sup>150</sup> Moreover, "the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in this most divine Medium Jesus Christ", who is the "beloved

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>149</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 15.

<sup>150</sup> *Principles*, p. 21.

and blessed Consort of God". However, though the "Flesh and Blood of Christ are of a Divine and Spiritual Nature", they are "not the very Essence of God".<sup>151</sup> God is distinguished from the *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah/*Elohim* by a numerical-spatial distinction. God, as the one infinite substance, is absolutely without any differentiation or limitation; whereas created spirits are:

For every *Spirit* is not the *Divine Essence*...in a numerical *Identity*...But that the *Divine Essence* can be divided... that we admit not of, but most highly adore the *Unity* which is in it... The *Divine Essence* itself therefore is not *constringed*, but that which was *Analagous* to it, viz. a *Created Spirit*.<sup>152</sup>

And these limited created spirits exist not only as plurality, whereas God is one, but in an infinite number: "Creatures are infinite [in number] and created in an infinity of ways, so that they cannot be bounded or limited by number or measure".<sup>153</sup> But even this infinity of created spirits does not add up to God's infinity, which is that concept of infinity as the undifferentiated or unlimited. The "Messiah... is not limitless like *Aensoph*",<sup>154</sup> and "as one infinity is greater than another, so God is always infinitely greater than all his creatures, so that nothing can be compared to him".<sup>155</sup> Indeed, this limitlessness of God refers also to the infinity of his mind: his omniscience is another essence by which God transcends created spirit. This is how Conway interprets the separation, the bounding off, of the created world from *Ein-Sof* in the *zimzum*:

According to the Hebrews, the infinite God, whom they call *Aensoph*, is said to exist outside the place of the world because a creature could not comprehend the immensity of his light.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 25.

<sup>152</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>153</sup> *Principles*, p. 16.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.



Furthermore, because spirits depend on God for their being, their wills are limited; but God, who is self-existing, has an unlimited or infinite will. However, as was shown above, Christian Lurianic Kabbalah asserts that though God was the source of the power of each spirit, when he created them, the ownership of that power passed over to them: each became the director or active principle for that power; otherwise: "if the Creature had no *own working*... then the Creature would be nothing else, but a meer instrument" of God.<sup>157</sup>

Thus the middle stratum of *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah/*Elohim*, or the plenum of spirits, stands in a relationship to God in which God is both immanent and transcendent. Yet, if the relationship of spirits to bodies is recalled, it will be found that the same double-aspected relationship holds between the middle stratum and the lower stratum of creatures. For, since spirits are the active casual principles of creatures, immanent in them as effects to which they are united, so Conway writes of the *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, that

the son himself is immediately present in all these creatures... He exists among them... If he were not present everywhere in all creatures, there would be an utter chasm and gap between God and creatures.<sup>158</sup>

However, individual active spirit principles are not the same as creatures, which consist in their conception as a *collection* of such spirits. Accordingly, the middle stratum, which is of the genus of all such spirits considered individually and separately is to be distinguished from creatures as being transcendent to them,

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<sup>157</sup> *The Divine Being*, section 33.

<sup>158</sup> *Principles*, pp. 25-26. See also p. 11: "The light of [the Messiah's] divine nature was shared with them [creatures]"; and p. 22: "All things are contained in [Christ] and have their existence in him... They remain forever in him in a certain way".



"because that mediator is far more excellent in terms of its own nature than all the other created beings which we call creatures".<sup>159</sup>

The precise nature of this medial being between God and creatures is not easily made clear. The *Adam Kadmon*/Messiah, according to Conway, is not really a third being intermediary between God and creature, since that would prevent God's immediate presence in creation:

No one supposes that the son is the kind of intermediary between God and creatures, which implies that God himself is not immediately present in all creatures.<sup>160</sup>

Conway states that God is pure spirit, as opposed to that of any creature, which always has some accompanying body or corporeal aspect. What the meaning of this *ens medium* might then be becomes quite paradoxical when Conway proceeds to affirm that there *is* a medium between these two states:

How can the human soul, even in the highest state of purity, be united with God, since God is pure spirit, whereas the soul, though pure in the highest degree, always partakes of corporeality? I answer that this happens through Jesus Christ, who is the true and appropriate medium between the two.<sup>161</sup>

If this is supposed to mean that the *ens medium* is both essentially pure spirit and corporeal, surely this is a *contradictio in adiecto*? But the solution, it seems to me, is to understand this *ens medium* as a sort of overlap zone between God on the one hand and the spirits which constitute creatures on the other, such that the entities in this zone can be said to have the attributes *both* of God *and* creature. Such a double aspect of substance has already been met with above when I set out the kabbalistic doctrine

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

of creation. I interpret the *Adam Kadmon*, the Messiah, *Elohim*, or the world of *Azilut*, as the plenum of things, which exists *both* as the infinity of ideas (of things) in God's mind, *and* as the infinity of spirits (ideas of things determined upon by God's will and actualized as spirit substances) in the world. Thus individual spirits are *both* pure spirit in that they are thoughts of the divine mind, *and* yet have a corporeal aspect, in that their conception as active principles necessitates they have a corollary passive principle, or body. And yet, as essentially *individual and separate* spirits, they are not creatures (which are related collections of such). Thus they are neither God nor creature. The account of Christ in terms of the word of God, as *both* essential *and* revealed, comes close to this explanation:

Jesus Christ signifies the whole Christ, who is God and man. As God, he is called *logos ousios*, or the essential word of the father. As man, he is the *logos proforikos*, or the word which is uttered and revealed, the perfect and substantial image of God's word, which is eternally in God and perpetually united to him so that it is his vehicle and organ, just like the body in respect to the soul. <sup>162</sup>

To the extent that the spirits which constitute creatures ultimately derive their being from God; that they pre-existed as ideas in his mind; and, further, that their own creation and continued existence depends on the presence of God's will; so it is that God can be conceived to be immanent in creatures; yet this only via the *ens medium*:

[God] is present in all things and immediately fills all things... yet he nevertheless uses this same mediator [Christ] as an instrument through which he works together with creatures. <sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 25. See also *Paradoxal Discourses*, part 2, p. 2: "Since then the Creator in and through the Son of God, is every where present in the Creatures, in the greater as well as in the lesser world... filling the same in all parts, and working in and with the same."; and see the draft notes to *Thoughts on Genesis*, OH, I, 84; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35: "Elohim is the executor sitting to the right hand of Jehovah and is plural of number, because he is this executor in all things".

This presence of God in creatures, via the Messiah, is referred to the Holy Ghost by the Christian kabbalists. The Son, the Messiah, the spirit plenum out of which creatures are formed, is also filled with the divine presence. These two, along with the infinite God himself, constitute the Christian Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost:

The Trinity represents God. The first concept is the infinite God himself, considered above and beyond his creation; the second is the same God insofar as he is the Messiah; the third is the same God insofar as he is with the Messiah in creatures.<sup>164</sup>

To the extent that certain attributes of God are communicable to created beings, he is said to be immanent in them; but as long as there remain some attributes which are incommunicable, then God's essence remains unique and distinguishable from created beings, or, God is transcendent, really creates, and the cosmological system is not pantheistic.

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<sup>164</sup> *Principles*, p. 11.



## Chapter 2 Leibniz's Association with Christian Lurianic Kabbalah

### 2.1 Leibniz and the Exponents of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah

#### *Christian Knorr von Rosenroth*

Leibniz seems to have first met von Rosenroth in 1671 in Sulzbach through van Helmont.<sup>1</sup> It is not known what they discussed at this time, but it was the beginning of a relationship that would last until von Rosenroth's death in 1689.

On the 9 January 1688 Leibniz arrived in Sulzbach where he remained as a guest of von Rosenroth for about ten days.<sup>2</sup> It was here and at this time that Leibniz first encountered the *Kabbala Denudata* and discussed its contents with the editor. Leibniz's overall opinion of this celebrated scholar and translator of Jewish mysticism was universally favourable. Very soon after leaving Sulzbach Leibniz writes to Landgraf Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels and reports his admiration for von Rosenroth's erudition and endeavours:

I find again a very capable man at Sulzbach named M. Knorr von Rosenroth, who is the chancellor. He spends what time his duties allow in investigating nature by way of chemistry and in bringing to light the cabbalistic antiquities

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<sup>1</sup> Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah*, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Foucher de Careil has written that Leibniz arrived in Sulzbach on 31 December 1687 / 9 January 1688, not departing until 1/11 February, "after a month's sojourn in that town". FoL, p. 56. Allison Coudert follows this, inferring that such a long stay would have furnished Leibniz with a significant knowledge of the contents of the *Kabbala Denudata*. See Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. xiii, 1.

However, it appears that, in fact, by 10/20 January Leibniz has already left Sulzbach and is at the frontier with northern Bohemia, looking for J.D. Crafft, whom he eventually found at the end of January (new style) in a place called Graupen. Even then, he does not return directly to Sulzbach, but, rather, spends the first half of February (new style) following a route which takes him through a number of mining towns. He probably returned to Sulzbach shortly after the middle of February, but by 11/21, he has left for Amberg. See Aiton, pp. 143-44; and K. Muller and G. Kronert, *Leben und Werk von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: eine Chronik* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1969), pp. 85-87. Indeed, Leibniz himself describes the Sulzbach visit as a mere *passing* through: "When I passed through Sulzbach...". See Letter to Placcius, 27 March 1696, D, vi, 70.

of the ancient Jews... Few Christians have seen it or can understand it. Many still make fun of such undertakings, but I think otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

To Gerhardt Molanus in April 1688 he writes that "there is scarcely anyone today among Christians more versed in the hidden knowledge of the Jews".<sup>4</sup>

Leibniz continued to speak highly of von Rosenroth after his death and was involved in the posthumous publication of some of his works.<sup>5</sup> These included the *Messias Puer* (though this never actually found itself into print), the *Harmony of the Evangelists*, and a German translation of Boethius's *Consolations of Philosophy*.<sup>6</sup> To this latter, though it appeared under van Helmont's name, Leibniz wrote the preface, in which he testifies to von Rosenroth's skills as a translator: "He was so skillful that many learned people did not find any difference between the original text and the translation".<sup>7</sup>

In some remarks written between 1706 and 1710 on J.G. Wachter's *Elucidarius Cabbalisticus*, Leibniz defends von Rosenroth and states the even-handedness with which he worked on the presentation of the *Kabbala Denudata*:

The author [Wachter] says that Knorr has not so much unveiled the true Kabbalah, or the secret philosophy of the Jews, as its worthless veneer: but Knorr gave both the good and the bad as he found it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 47; A, 1, v, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 48; A, 1, v, 109.

<sup>5</sup> In 1692, for example, in a letter to Vincent Placcius, Leibniz writes that "He [van Helmont] himself had a great friendship with Knorr Rosenroth... who meditated excellently on the very hidden things of the Jews, which the *Kabbala Denudata* sets forth. When I passed through Sulzbach, he showed me a book composed by himself, with the title *Messias Puer*.". See D, vi, 70.

<sup>6</sup> Pe, pp. 210-213.

<sup>7</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 64; LH, 1, Theologie, V, 2, fol. 25r.

<sup>8</sup> B, p. 2.



In 1707 Leibniz mentions that "many times I spoke with Herr Knorr about the Cabala of the Hebrews", that the "subject should not be scorned" and that "I applaud his extensive and full interpretation".<sup>9</sup>

### *Francis Mercury van Helmont*

Leibniz first met Francis Mercury van Helmont in 1671 in Mainz. As well as discussing alchemy, it was arranged that Leibniz would have his first introduction to von Rosenroth.<sup>10</sup> They would not meet again for eight years until when, in December 1679, they both happened to be visiting the sick Princess Elizabeth at Herford, Germany: van Helmont having recently left England following the death of Anne Conway.<sup>11</sup> Seventeen years will pass until they next meet in Hannover in 1696 with the Electress Sophie.

In a letter to the Electress in 1694 Leibniz refers to the *Divine Being* which van Helmont had sent to her and which she had forwarded on to Leibniz for his opinion.<sup>12</sup> But Leibniz's visit to Sulzbach in 1688 would already have furnished him with a general view of van Helmont's thoughts, gleaned through his conversations with von Rosenroth, and possibly through some reading of the *Kabbala Denudata*. In some remarks made by Leibniz in 1695, he groups van Helmont with von Rosenroth and More, distinguishing them from the usual run of "spiritualizers" or mystics, who

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<sup>9</sup> To Louis Bourguet, GP, iii, 546. See also letter to Bourguet, 1714, GP, iii, 563: "As regards that which is from the Cabbalists, the *Kabbala Denudata* of Mr. Knorr, who was a man of great erudition and one of my friends, deserves merit; he wanted to reduce it to a system."

<sup>10</sup> A, 1, iii, 442. Allison Coudert has investigated the relationship between Leibniz and van Helmont at length. See her *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 25-77.

<sup>11</sup> Aiton, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> 3 September 1694; L Br 389, fol. 9 ff.



shun the philosophical approach.<sup>13</sup> And in a letter written in the same year he notes that "strange [mira] things about religion and philosophy are being published" by van Helmont, who "derives many things from the cabbalists of the Jews and the unusual words of the chemists".<sup>14</sup>

But the Electress was not only responsible for bringing van Helmont's writings to the attention of Leibniz, for in the March of 1696, nearly twenty five years after their first meeting in Mainz, she brought the two together in her study for conversations which would take place almost daily over a period of a fortnight.<sup>15</sup> Leibniz thought that "many of Mr. Helmont's opinions still remain vague and unproven" though he is "in agreement with him on many things about which neither common teaching nor the new opinions of the Cartesians can agree."<sup>16</sup>

It was at this time that direct correspondence between Leibniz and van Helmont began, and which would last for the following two years until the latter's death. In forwarding a letter to van Helmont from von Rosenroth's son, Leibniz's covering letter states a hope that he and the Electress will be able to "enjoy your conversation for years on end"; and that "I recall our conversations and I am glad to learn that you have resolved to communicate before long to the world some of your fine and important ideas."<sup>17</sup> This last might hint at a provisional arrangement for Leibniz to set down van Helmont's ideas, which would eventually be the work known as

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<sup>13</sup> See notes made on William Penn, 1695, Gr, i, 91: "I see that most of those who pretend to a grander spirituality, in particular the Quakers, endeavour to bestow a disgust for the contemplation of natural truths. But to my way of thinking they should do the exact opposite and not be willing to maintain our laziness or ignorance <and that is what I find in Helmont, Knorr, More and Poiret, who are more reasonable than most of the others, even though I might not wish to sanction many of their opinions where they deviate from the church>".

<sup>14</sup> To Thomas Smith, 1695; Gr, I, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Thomas Burnett, March 1696; GP, iii, 176.

<sup>16</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 81; L Br 389, fols. 1 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 49; L Br 389, fol. 23.

*Thoughts on Genesis*, for this was the only communication of van Helmont's ideas remaining to be published by 1696.

Later in this year van Helmont returned to Hannover. Leibniz's journal refers to a conversation with him on 7 August, and regular conversations took place until his departure on 23 September. They spoke about various matters, as the journal entries show, but it seems very likely that it was at this time that Leibniz took down extensive notes of those ideas of van Helmont which he would base *Thoughts on Genesis* on.<sup>18</sup> Also at this time Leibniz appears to have written the set of notes Grua entitled *De homine, beatitudine, deo, christo*, and which seems to contain ideas inspired by his conversations with van Helmont.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Leibniz also wrote a "report" summarizing van Helmont's ideas and the extent to which he, Leibniz, was able to grasp them.<sup>20</sup> In the first paragraph of this report, Leibniz writes:

There is no one here in this country, who has had as much patience as I, not only to deal with him [van Helmont] but also to listen to him; not only to ask questions, but also to wait for his responses and for him to reformulate them again one more time, until it was not possible to get any further. How many times I took the pen in my hand in his presence to formulate diverse expressions and connections and sketch an outline of his view, but hardly ever were we able to reach the end.<sup>21</sup>

Within two years of this visit van Helmont was dead. When he left Hannover he would not return, and he and Leibniz never met again, though they corresponded up to the time of his death.

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<sup>18</sup> A detailed discussion of Leibniz's involvement in van Helmont's last work follows in the next section.

<sup>19</sup> Gr, i, 96-98 contains selections of this piece (translated into French); and this is further translated into English by Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 128-30. A complete transcript of the original Latin of sections 13-27, which Grua merely summarizes, is at OK, ii, 1056-61 from L Br, 67, fols 52-53.

<sup>20</sup> See OK, ii, 909-19; LH, IV, iii, 8c, fols 7-8. Various editions, such as those by Klopp, Feller and Gerhardt, have reproduced fragments of this report. Orio de Miguel has collected a single complete text here.

<sup>21</sup> OK, ii, 911; LH, IV, ii, 8c, fol. 7.



Leibniz never met nor corresponded with Anne, Viscountess of Conway. Possibly the first time he learnt anything about her was when he met van Helmont in 1679. Van Helmont, recently returning from Ragley following the death of Conway, would no doubt have mentioned her to Leibniz; indeed he had on him the manuscript of the *Principles*. But the meeting was brief, and the occasion was the sickness of a common friend, so it is unlikely that the lady or her philosophy were discussed at length. But during the Hannover meeting of seventeen years later, in March 1696, van Helmont tells Leibniz about Conway, as Leibniz reports in a letter to Thomas Burnett in the same month:

For the past few days M. Helmont has been here with us... He was a close friend of Madame, the Countess of Kennaway [Conway], and he has told the history of this extraordinary lady.<sup>22</sup>

No doubt during his visit later in the same year, in August and September, van Helmont spoke further of this woman whose home he had lived in for nine years, and which had been a key centre in the development of seventeenth century Christian Kabbalah. Referring to the author of the *Principles* in a 1701 book review, Leibniz says: "This lady was Countess Conway, the sister of Chancellor Heneage Finch, as one remembers often to have heard from Monsieur Helmont".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 38; GP, iii, 176.

<sup>23</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 116; *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: De l'Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine (1693)...*, ed. by M. Fichant (Paris: J. Vrin, 1991), p. 97.



## 2.2 Leibniz and the Cosmological Texts of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah

### 2.2.1 The *Kabbala Denudata*

Evidence that Leibniz had knowledge of the contents of the *Kabbala Denudata* comes primarily from the entry in his journal made during his visit to von Rosenroth in early 1688. Some later writings also point at knowledge of particular items in the work.

First, though, here is the journal entry:

M Rosenroth has published, he says, different things without using his name, like the *Kabbala Denudata*, part one and two. The first contains a procedure for dyeing cloth taken from some Jews and which is bound to be excellent. The second part has some fragments from the Zohar, the Zohar published in Hebrew, with old commentaries. Guillaume Prostel [=Postel] began a translation of the Zohar from that which someone had sent him from Oxford, but he did not understand it sufficiently. He was deprived of the assistance that we have now. The Jews are editing at this moment in Sulzbach a New Syriac Testament in Hebrew characters. He has edited a harmony of the Gospels; Luther's translation is printed in German characters. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are designated by the letters a b c d, that which is found in one of them is marked by a single letter, that which is found in several is marked by several letters. He has some handsome oriental books, which are listed at the end of the *Kabbala Denudata*. He has translated from English certain questions on the pre-existence of souls; there are there opinions which he does not embrace as his own. He has taken trouble over the German edition of the works of Helmont and added some commentaries. The New Helicon is a collection of sacred songs printed, I believe, in Frankfurt and which one can find at Nuremburg at Felsekern.

I have glanced through the *Kabbala Denudata* with him, from which I have drawn the following:

The infinite being consists in an indivisible point, and the emanated light or the sphere of activity despatches its light by its will.

The first born of the creatures, the Messiah, in as much as he is a creature, is called Adam Kadmon; he receives the first rays of the light and forwards these on towards the creatures.

The second class is Adam or the body of souls.

The third class is that of the intelligences superior to souls.

The fourth is *microprosopon*, or more briefly the passions.

The fifth class is that of the inferior intelligences which have fallen and which he calls Adam Belial.

The last class is that of the kingdom, or the sephirs in which the spirits or *substantial forms* are contained. Seized with disgust for the supreme light and

obscured in their fall, the six classes contained in Adam Belial experience a certain suffering as inferior creatures, it is this then that St. Paul refers when he speaks of  
35 the suffering of creatures. This same corruption is extended up into the superior classes; but the Messiah descended and put the superior classes in the place of the fallen ones. From the fallen angels he made the husks, that is the obscured lights. These are those who afterwards have led the souls in captivity, and it is thus that the souls are enclosed in the husks from which they will be extracted little by little  
40 by generation, which supposes [Leibniz remarks] that their choice is removed. The souls are divided into the soul of the head, the neck, etc. The body comprises eight times the measure of the head, and this indication is cabalistic; it indicates the eighth millenium of the world.

Man, who is at the time the summary and last term of the creation, is a world in  
45 abridgement, or microcosmos. When the husks are exhausted, that is to say, when all the souls have been extracted, that will be the time of the consummation. All souls have sinned in Adam and Eve, whence came original sin. The Messiah took a body, it is therefore necessary to distinguish three things in him: his divinity, his class [as] the first born of the creatures, and finally that he was born in time, of a  
50 virgin. There are different interpretations of the divine persons. The Son corresponds to the class of the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit to that of the souls. St. Paul appears to distinguish between God and the Father of Our Saviour Jesus Christ. He fixes the coming of the Messiah and his reign on earth about the year 1832.<sup>24</sup>

Before indicating which sections of the *Kabbala Denudata* may be referred to here, I would like to point out a number of features of this report which makes it clear that what Leibniz has seen of the *Kabbala Denudata* at this time is *only superficial*.

1) At lines 2 to 3 he mentions something in part one of the *Kabbala Denudata*, namely a "procedure for dyeing cloth". Tome 1 of the *Kabbala Denudata* contains a large lexicon of kabbalistic terms, essays by von Rosenroth, More, van Helmont and Jewish kabbalists, the large Lurianic work *Porta Coelorum*, and the many diagrams in part 4. One is at a loss to explain how the only thing that was salient in Leibniz's mind about this tome was a process for dyeing cloth. At the very least, however, it strongly suggests that he had not read anything properly of tome 1 at this time.

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<sup>24</sup> FoL, pp. 57-59.



2) At lines 13-14 Leibniz states that there is a list of oriental books "at the end of the *Kabbala Denudata*". I have not seen such a list myself in the several different editions I have examined.

3) At line 19 Leibniz writes "Ich habe mit ihm ein buch so ein Cabbala Denudata durchgangen, daraus folgendes zu wissen...".<sup>25</sup> The verb durchgangen is the past participle of durchgehen, correctly translated as "gone through". Though this could be construed as "read", that he had done this "*with him*" (von Rosenroth) implies a *looking over*: one *glances through* books *with* others: one does not read properly large tomes with other people. Foucher de Careil in his publication of these notes follows this using the French "J'ai parcouru", which in English means "glanced through", "perused", "looked over", "run through".<sup>26</sup>

4) The *Kabbala Denudata* is a work of over 2,500 pages. In a visit to von Rosenroth lasting about ten days it is improbable that Leibniz would have found time to make any kind of serious study of the book, particularly since, as a guest, he is unlikely to have shut himself away. On the contrary, during this time he had meetings with others, including a local fossil collector with whom he discussed mineralogy, and also visited a lead mine.<sup>27</sup> Although none of this can preclude Leibniz's having read some items properly during his time in Sulzbach, his overall knowledge of the contents of the *Kabbala Denudata* has to be sketchy at best. Indeed, these notes may well be the outcome of a simultaneous perusal and discussion; and the intercalation of "he says" and "he calls" at lines 1 and 30 strongly suggests this.

From the notes reproduced above, knowledge by Leibniz of at least the existence of certain items in the *Kabbala Denudata* can be ascertained.

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<sup>25</sup> RJ, fol. 35r. This is the facsimile of the original German MS in Leibniz's hand. Foucher de Careil has given a typescript French translation of this.

<sup>26</sup> FoL, p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> Aiton, p. 144.

1) At line 4 he refers to "some fragments from the *Zohar*" in the second tome: these are those of the *Sifra de-Zeni'uta*, the *Idra Rabba* and *Idra Zuta*.

2) At line 5 he mentions old commentaries on the *Zohar*: a reference to tracts 4 and 5 of tome 2 of part 2, by Hayim Vital and Naphtali Bacharach.

3) At lines 14-15 he refers, without naming the author, to the contributions by Henry More (the critical essays translated from English and which von Rosenroth does not agree with) and which appear in part 2 of tome 1.

4) Lines 21 onwards, which may well be nothing more than a resume of a conversation and going over of the *Kabbala Denudata* with von Rosenroth, on the other hand might indicate something approximating to a reading of the final section of the work, the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*. Firstly, if von Rosenroth were to direct Leibniz to a succinct summary of the christianized Lurianic Kabbalah, then this essay would be one of the best suited. Secondly, the list of classes of being and the language used to describe them by Leibniz in his journal (lines 23-30), follows rather closely that of a passage in the *Adumbratio*:

- 6 PC [The Philosophical Christian:] So in the first class was located the Soul of the Messiah, which immediately attached itself by its contemplation and love to the highest object of all: that is, that grade of Divinity communicated to itself, which in our Trinity is called the Son; and is that Light admitted into the first Adam. For with this grade the soul remained united, and will always remain united, without any interruption of its affection. Hence this mark of Divinity was itself set forth for him and has to be contemplated and loved under the name of the crown.
- 7 In the second class was located the whole body of human souls, of which the Messiah was the head. And these, under the form of a united human body, which is called Adam Protoplastes, were fashioned into the class of Wisdom, which is actually called           , that is man; on account of the number           , that is 45. (See Apparatus Pt. 1 p. 48)
- 8 In the third class were located the Angels, who are now called the good ones, having been fashioned into the class of Understanding: whence they are still called, by custom, by the name of Intelligences by the Greek as well as the Barbaric philosophers.
- 9 In the fourth class were located those spirits, who are now called evil Angels, having been shaped into the class of Microprosopus, or of the six following



numerations, namely mercy, severity, beauty, victory, glory and foundation: of which the head was that spirit, who now after his fall is called by the Cabbalists Samael, and in the Gospel Beelzebub, the leader of Daemons, Luke 11.15, as the Lord of this dwelling-place of the worldly citizen: of which the appearance was Daath or Knowledge, or the Soul of your six numerations: just as he set down the whole body, which is now called Adam Belial, 2 Cor. 6 v. 15.

10 In the fifth class were located those spirits, who are now called seminal forms and are in matter; of whom the appearance then was the Kingdom, or the lowest numeration.<sup>28</sup>

The references to Paul that then appear in the journal also appear in the *Adumbratio* soon after the above passage.

Thirdly, the name "Adam Belial" (lines 30 and 33 in the journal) I have been unable to locate anywhere in the *Kabbala Denudata*, except in the *Adumbratio* where it appears several times.<sup>29</sup>

5) Chapter IV of the *Adumbratio* (as well as chapter V) makes reference to the *Cabbalistical Dialogue* of tome 1 part 2. It is possible to speculate that Leibniz may have gone on to read this essay here also, especially as it is a mere five pages long. However, this work is never mentioned anywhere in Leibniz's extant writings.

6) As for the question as to whether Leibniz might have read item 11 of part 2 of tome 1, the *Fundamenta Philosophiae* by Henry More, this depends on the only (and indirect) reference included in Leibniz's remarks on J.G. Wachter's *Elucidarius Cabbalisticus*. Even if Leibniz was referring to this essay, he might not have read it in the *Kabbala Denudata*, for the same had been published in More's *Opera Omnia* of which Leibniz possessed a copy in 1679. The remarks on Wachter mention the "cabbalistic theses of Henry More" which were set out in the *Fundamenta Philosophiae* (in order to be criticized). The implication is that Leibniz must therefore

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<sup>28</sup> *Adumbratio*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. pp. 27, 56, 61, 70.

have read the essay; but a close scrutiny of Wachter's work alongside these remarks by Leibniz shows that the words are in fact Wachter's, i.e. Leibniz is merely noting down what Wachter says, and is not referring to More's cabbalistic theses himself.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore Wachter who has read the *Fundamenta Philosophiae*; and so there is no evidence here, or anywhere else, that Leibniz had done so himself.<sup>31</sup>

Though it is of course possible that Leibniz could have read any or even several items in the *Kabbala Denudata* during his visit to von Rosenroth, *there is no evidence that he did*. The evidence of the journal entry made at this time indicates a superficial knowledge of what was in the *Kabbala Denudata*, the only exception being a possible reading of the *Adumbratio*. The assertions by some scholars that Leibniz was directly acquainted with specific items in the *Kabbala Denudata* cannot be upheld.<sup>32</sup>

In 1692 in a letter to Simon de la Loubère, Leibniz mentions a magical square:

The late Mr. Knorr, who gave us the *Zohar* of the Jews and the *Kabbala Denudata*, and who was perhaps the most knowledgeable man in Europe about the most hidden matters of the Jews, showed me a magical square..."<sup>33</sup>

This may well have been one of the magical squares included in the Lexicon of the *Kabbala Denudata*, the magic squares of the *Esh Mezaref*.

But if the evidence is lacking that Leibniz ever studied the *Kabbala Denudata* in depth, he is almost always full of praise for it, and clearly considers it a work of importance. In the same year as his first sight of it in Sulzbach, he writes to Hiob Ludolph that:

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<sup>30</sup> B, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of this, see Stuart Brown, "Leibniz and More's Cabbalistic Circle", in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. by Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 77-95.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Coudert says that Leibniz "specifically says he 'read over' the *Kabbala Denudata* and therefore read this text [the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*]" . Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



He [von Rosenroth] has bought many important manuscripts, some found in the East, others elsewhere, from which he digs out the secrets of their teachings, which are for the most part metaphysical and examples of which appear in the *Kabbala Denudata* and elsewhere.<sup>34</sup>

In 1696 to Placcius he rates highly the thought von Rosenroth gave to what he found in the Kabbalah: "Rosenroth... a man of learning in all respects... meditated excellently on the most hidden things of the Jews, which the Cabbala Denudata sets forth."<sup>35</sup>

To Bourguet in 1714 he writes:

As regards that which is from the Cabbalists, the Cabala Denudata of Mr. Knorr, it deserves merit. He was a man of great erudition and one of my friends; he wanted to reduce it to a system.<sup>36</sup>

In 1716 to Samuel Masson he says: "I do not have the time to consult this latter work [the *Kabbala Denudata*] and compare its opinions with mine."<sup>37</sup> But this statement may be disingenuous because Leibniz is seeking to distance himself from the Kabbalah here in response to an anonymous critic who had compared Leibniz's philosophy to that of the Kabbalah, as the letter makes clear.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 38; A, I, v, 235.

<sup>35</sup> D, vi, 70.

<sup>36</sup> GP, iii 563.

<sup>37</sup> AG, pp. 226-27; GP, vi, 625.

<sup>38</sup> The critic was in all probability John Toland. See Antonio Lamarra, "An Anonymous Criticism from Berlin to Leibniz's Philosophy: John Toland against Mathematical Abstractions", in *Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft*, 16 (1990), 89-102.

## 2.2.2 Van Helmont's Works

### *Alphabeti vere naturalis*

Leibniz read the *Alphabeti* in the same year that it was published, 1667.<sup>39</sup> A later note states how when van Helmont

was a prisoner of the Inquisition in Rome [he] took it into his head, in his solitude, to examine the function of the origin in pronouncing letters and thought he had found how these characters are formed.<sup>40</sup>

Although there are few references to this book by Leibniz, its contents, on natural language theory, are of particular relevance to Leibniz's universal science project. This is discussed in chapter 3.1.

### *Two Hundred Queries*

Leibniz was sent a copy of the *Two Hundred Queries* in October 1696 by van Helmont. Leibniz's replying letter of the 18<sup>th</sup> makes it clear that he has read the work, though what he writes does not constitute a critique.<sup>41</sup>

### *Paradoxal Discourses*

None of the references Leibniz makes to the *Paradoxal Discourses* explicitly states that he read the book. However, a letter written in 1691 mentions it with some

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<sup>39</sup> A, 6, I, 283.

<sup>40</sup> L, p. 632.

<sup>41</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 69; LBr, 389, f. 53.



publication details, and a personal opinion on Helmontian ideas.<sup>42</sup> It therefore *seems likely* that Leibniz had read the book by this time. In the "report" Leibniz wrote on van Helmont in 1696, he notes that "The *Paradoxes concerning the Macrocosm and the Microcosm* of Mr. Helmont were translated from English into German and printed in Hamburg." It continues, discussing ideas also to be found in the *Paradoxical Discourses*, namely: that nature is full of life; that spirits are the only unities, whereas bodies are only ever aggregates; that all things proceed to perfection, eventually to be re-united in a whole; that everything exists and moves according to the order instantiated by God; and that man is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Leibniz presents ideas which are van Helmont's and contrasts them with his own views.<sup>43</sup>

### *The Spirit of Diseases*

When Leibniz wrote to Princess Sophie after reading a copy of the *Divine Being*, which she had sent to him in 1694, he stated that "I wished that there had been joined there... *The Spirit of Diseases* cited in the book by Mr. Buchius about God."<sup>44</sup> However, there is a copy of the English edition in the Leibniz archive, and which contains underlinings, most probably by Leibniz himself.<sup>45</sup> The evidence, therefore, points to Leibniz having read this work after September 1694.

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<sup>42</sup> To Daniel Laroque, 21/31-7-1691, OK i, 266.

<sup>43</sup> See OK, ii, 911-19; LH, IV, iii, 8c, fols 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> 3 September 1694, in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 54; L Br, 389, fol. 9.

<sup>45</sup> I am grateful to Bernardino Orio de Miguel for supplying me with this information.

## *The Divine Being*

Leibniz was sent a copy of the *Divine Being* by Sophie and he made a lengthy resumé of its contents.<sup>46</sup> This shows that the preface, all five chapters, and especially the appendix, had been read and had notes made on them. However, it is essentially a summary of the ideas in the book, and Leibniz only makes a few critical comments. From these notes, Leibniz produced that part of a letter to Sophie dated 3 September 1694, in which he writes about the ideas expressed in the work, though rather generally, and tending to state his own thoughts at the expense of the details of van Helmont's.<sup>47</sup>

## *Seder Olam*

Leibniz had received a copy of the *Seder Olam* from Princess Sophie.<sup>48</sup> There are extant more written notes and critical comments by Leibniz on this work than for any other work by the Christian Lurianic kabbalists.

In a letter from Lorenz Hertel, his secretary, dated 14/24 July 1694, Hertel asks Leibniz for his opinion on the *Seder Olam*.<sup>49</sup> In his reply of two days later, Leibniz makes a few brief comments about the work:

Regarding the new *Seder Olam*, which comes from the Kabbalah factory of Mr Helmont, it is without doubt the most amusing of all chimeras for you and me.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This is located at LH I, V, 2f, fols 30, 31, 31r, 32, but has not been published. A transcript of this is available in OK, ii, 1065-75.

<sup>47</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 56-57; L Br, 389, fol. 9ff.

<sup>48</sup> A, I, xi, 18ff.

<sup>49</sup> OK, ii, 847-48; A, I, x, 46.

<sup>50</sup> OK, ii, 847-48; A, I, x, 49.



It is clear then that between its publication in 1693 and July 1694 Leibniz had read the *Seder Olam*, and that the various undated sets of remarks belong to this period. The first of these is a summary written without critical comments and which shows that Leibniz had read the book right through.<sup>51</sup> From these study notes Leibniz drafted a fair résumé in which he included his own opinions. He gave it the title *On a little book entitled Seder Olam published about 1693 or 1694*.

In an essay sent to Loeflerus dated 13 December 1694, Leibniz makes reference to the *Seder Olam* when he criticizes the notion that Christ was the middle being through whom all other creatures were made.<sup>52</sup> But it is to a summary sent to Hertel on 8 January 1695 that further extensive and critical writings on the work are to be found. Four versions of this letter exist. Two are reasonably detailed; the other two are mere compressions of the first two and offer no new opinions by Leibniz.

In summary, then, there are three useful critical pieces on the *Seder Olam*:

- 1) One of the long versions of the letter to Hertel (published as "L1" in the Akademie edition), which refers to the themes raised in the first twenty six sections of the work.<sup>53</sup>
- 2) The résumé (published by Foucher de Careil as *On a little book entitled Seder Olam...*), which discusses themes from section 27 on.<sup>54</sup>
- 3) The other long version of the letter to Hertel ("L2" in the Akademie edition), which contains general remarks pertaining to the book as a whole.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> This MS is located at LH 1, V, d, fols 24-24r and has not been published. A transcript is to be found in OK, ii, 1048-50.

<sup>52</sup> D, 1, 19.

<sup>53</sup> A, 1, xi, 854-54.

<sup>54</sup> This was published in FoL, pp. 49-54, but it contains omissions and errors. An English translation of this exists in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 60-62, but with new errors. A full transcript is to be found in OK, pp. 1050-54.

<sup>55</sup> A, 1, xi, 855-57.

## *A Rabbinical and Paraphractical Exposition of Genesis I*

There is no evidence that Leibniz ever had access to this work (and it was not included in the *Kabbala Denudata*). However, given Leibniz's involvement in *Thoughts on Genesis*, for which the *Rabbinical and Paraphractical Exposition* was a prototype, it would be surprising if van Helmont had not furnished Leibniz with a copy of it.

### 2.2.3 The *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*

Although it is possible that Leibniz might at least have glanced at the *Principles* in its English version in 1679 when he met van Helmont (and he could read English reasonably well by this time <sup>56</sup>), the brevity and the circumstances of that occasion make it unlikely. But in his 1696 conversations with van Helmont it seems reasonable to suppose that Leibniz would have learnt much about Conway's ideas directly.

Leibniz wrote to van Helmont on 18 October, commenting on the *Two Hundred Queries*, which the latter had sent him. <sup>57</sup> This work is known only to have appeared in the *Opuscula Philosophica*, in which also is contained *The Vulgar Philosophy Refuted*, and Anne Conway's *Principles*. Since there is a copy of the *Opuscula Philosophica* at the Hannover archive, with some annotations in Leibniz's hand to the *Principles* contained therein, it is to be assumed that it was at this time that Leibniz received Conway's work. In the letter above, it is clear that Leibniz had read the *Two*

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<sup>56</sup> Aiton, p. 66.

<sup>57</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 69; L Br, 389, fol. 53.



*Hundred Queries* by 18 October, and so he may even have read the *Principles* then.

But the first strong evidence comes in a passage in Leibniz's MS version of *Thoughts on Genesis*, which he had prepared by the following Spring of 1697. Leibniz has written:

There is life in all things and they go astray who suppose corporeal things are composed out of atoms devoid of all life. And concerning this matter, many things are usefully suggested by Henry More, perhaps by the author of the *Cabala Denudata*; also by the author of the *Vulgar Philosophy refuted*, which was published with the meditations of the very clever English Countess, in which [in quibus] more of the same can be read.<sup>58</sup>

Note that the relative of the final clause ("in quibus"), because it is in the plural, definitely refers to the (plural) "meditations" of Conway, and not the (singular) "*Vulgar Philosophy Refuted*". For Leibniz to refer to Conway in connection to the specific philosophical issue he asserts; to pronounce her "very clever"; and to state that "much more of the same can be read" in her *Principles*, strongly suggests that Leibniz has read her work by Spring 1697. That he also mentions the *Vulgar Philosophy Refuted*, further corroborates the other evidence that he read Conway's work in the *Opuscula Philosophica*.

Unfortunately, the annotations written by Leibniz in his copy of the *Principles* (now held at the Hannover archive) refer only to the author being the Countess of Conway. However, there are five separate places where Leibniz has underlined certain points in the text. In chapter 1 he has underlined the words "In God there is an idea which is his image or the word existing within himself" (section 6); and, "For the

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<sup>58</sup> LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 56: "In omnibus rebus vita inest, et a janua aberrant qui res corporeas ex atomis et particulis omni vita destitutis conflatas esse arbitrantur. Qua de re multa utiliter sunt admonita ab Henrico More, an autore Cabalae Denudatae; item ab autore Philosophiae Vulgaris refutatae, qui fuit editus cum meditationibus ingeniosissimae Comtissae Anglae, in quibus plura in eundem sensum legi possunt."

same reason there is spirit or will in God" (section 7). In the part of this chapter called the "Annotations", which relates to kabbalistic cosmology, Leibniz has underlined "This void was not privation or non-being but an actual place of diminished light, which was the soul of the Messiah, called *Adam Kadmon*" (annotation 3); and, regarding the production of creatures from the Messiah, "the diminution of his light having recently occurred" (annotation 5). In chapter 2, concerning Conway's point against there being a finite time in the past when creation occurred, Leibniz has underlined the words "they admit that there was time before all times, which is a manifest contradiction" (section 2). This is as far as the underlinings go.<sup>59</sup> It would be inappropriate to draw any inferences regarding Leibniz's approval of the words he has underlined. However, they do indicate that he read at least the first two chapters.

Now several of Leibniz's remarks on Conway's philosophy, such as the one quoted above, refer to her vitalism, and especially as it opposes what she sees as the dead atomism of Henry More. Since this theme does not arise in the first two chapters, it is reasonable to suggest he read further. Chapter 3 (section 9) argues against More's "indiscerpible points"; chapter 7 argues for a vitalism since "dead matter is completely non-being, a vain fiction and chimera" (section 2), and "truly there is no body anywhere which does not have motion and consequently life or spirit" (section 4); and chapters 7 and 8 argue at length for a spirit-body vital continuum. This aside, it seems reasonable to suppose that Leibniz would have read most, if not all, of the book in order to be correctly apprised of her philosophy, before making remarks in publications or to correspondents in which he compares his own philosophy favourably to that of Conway's. In May 1697 he writes to Thomas Burnett:

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<sup>59</sup> Becco, pp. 124-25. Bernardino Orio de Miguel has also examined this book in the archive and assures me that Becco's report of Leibniz's underlinings is exhaustive.



There is something in the opinions of the late Madam the Countess of Connaway which recurs to me, although granted with many restrictions, and of a style very different from that usually taken by those who spiritualize. <sup>60</sup>

And in August, to the same correspondent:

My own ideas in philosophy approach somewhat those of the late Madam the countess of Conway, and hold the mean between Plato and Democritus, since I believe that everything happens mechanically as Democritus and Descartes wish against the opinion of Mr Moore and his like. And that nevertheless everything happens vitally also, and follows final causes, all things being full of life and of perceptions against the opinion of the Democriteans. <sup>61</sup>

But Leibniz is probably restraining his approval here, perhaps on account of the book's kabbalism. In unpublished remarks, he is more fulsome in his praise. His note in the MS version of *Thoughts on Genesis* quoted above, which was not included in the published edition, refers to her as "very clever"; and in his draft version of the *New Essays* he writes: "The Platonic philosophy of the Countess of Conway, approved by other English people, is in many respects to my liking". <sup>62</sup> But in the published version of this work, she is merely one of the better vitalists: Leibniz's philosophy allows him

to make sense of those who put life and perception into everything, e.g. of Cardano, Campanella, and (better than them) of the late Platonist Countess of Conway, and our friend the late M. Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont. <sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> GP, iii, 205.

<sup>61</sup> A, I, xiv, 450.

<sup>62</sup> A, 6, vi, 47.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 72.

Finally, in a letter to Lady Masham of 1703, Leibniz wrote "I have seen an example [of "the acuteness of English ladies"] in the work of the late Madam the Countess of Conway".<sup>64</sup>

On the evidence here, it seems that Leibniz was not only familiar with Conway's philosophy, but thought highly of it. It is not necessary, therefore, to make exaggerated claims along the lines that some scholars have engaged in.<sup>65</sup>

### 2.3 Leibniz's Involvement in *Thoughts on Genesis*

*Thoughts on Genesis* first appeared in Latin in 1697. It was published in Amsterdam with the full title *Quaedam praemeditatae et consideratae Cogitationes super Quatuor priora Capita libri primi Moysis Genesis nominati*. It also appeared in German, in 1697; and an English translation was published in London in 1701.<sup>66</sup> As with most of van Helmont's books this was produced with the aid of another person who noted down van Helmont's ideas during conversations with him, then arranged these notes into a format suitable for publication. In the case of this last van Helmont book, this other person was Leibniz himself.<sup>67</sup> Although the preface was actually written by van Helmont, in Flemish, even here Leibniz was involved: he translated it from van Helmont's native language into Latin, as a letter from the latter to Leibniz,

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<sup>64</sup> GP, iii, 336-37.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Marjorie Nicolson's claim that "Anne Conway's name appears again and again in Leibniz's letters", cannot be substantiated. *The Conway Letters*, ed. by Marjorie Nicolson, rev. by Sarah Hutton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 455.

<sup>66</sup> OH, I, 19.

<sup>67</sup> This was first established by Anne Becco in 1978, see Becco, 126-129. Bernardino Orio de Miguel has recently done further conclusive research into this: see OH, I, 23-43.



dated 1/11 March 1697, makes clear.<sup>68</sup> That the main part of the work was Leibniz's can be established by an examination of a dossier of writings at the Hannover archive. This dossier contains one set of papers in Leibniz's hand (at LH, 1, V, 2g, fols 45v-80r) which corresponds exactly to that of the published Latin edition; and another set of papers, also in Leibniz's hand (at fols 34v-44r and 81v-82r) and which contains notes evidently taken down at great speed, as is evident from the frequently missed-out letters, incomplete phrases, insertions and marginalia, along with interspersions in German, and a generally unclear hand, indicative of hurried writing.<sup>69</sup> A comparison of the two shows quite clearly that the former is an expanded and proper arrangement of the notes of the latter. It is therefore beyond reasonable doubt that the latter is the draft set of notes Leibniz took down during conversation-dictation with van Helmont; and that the former is the MS version which Leibniz later produced from this draft, quite probably utilizing also his own notes made on van Helmont's other books.<sup>70</sup>

This conclusion that *Thoughts on Genesis* originated in a conversation-dictation with van Helmont is corroborated in Leibniz's own words at the beginning of the MS version of the preface, where Leibniz writes: "You possess... the discourses desired for so long, which our friend F.M.v.H. made by mouth on the first four chapters of Genesis."

The final piece of evidence that it was Leibniz who wrote *Thoughts* is contained on the page at the beginning of the dossier at the archive, on which Leibniz has written "I wanted to express the opinion of my friend...".<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> OK, ii, 1084-87; L Br, 389, fols 81-85.

<sup>69</sup> See OH, I, 33-34.

<sup>70</sup> The whole of the draft version has now been transcribed and published by Orio de Miguel, OH, I, 82-137. He has also included some facsimiles of the folios.

<sup>71</sup> Gr, I, 98.

The draft which Leibniz took down in conversation-dictation with van Helmont must have been produced when the two were together, and this could only have been in the year 1696, when van Helmont was resident in Hannover as the guest of Princess Sophie, either during his first visit of that year, a fortnight in March, or during the second visit, from early June until his departure on 13 September.<sup>72</sup> However, in a letter to Hermann von der Hardt, of mid-June, Leibniz, in discussing van Helmont, writes:

And since he does not have sufficient patience and practise to write, I wish that some young erudite person would help to write down in some way certain of his meditations on the passages of Scripture, and principally the commentaries on Genesis.<sup>73</sup>

This implies that at this time, mid-June, Leibniz had not yet taken it upon himself to do the task. Therefore, the earlier March visit by van Helmont seems not to have been the occasion when the draft of *Thoughts* was made, but rather the second visit. Indeed, Leibniz's diary entries for the 10 and 16 August refer to conversations on the interpretation of Scripture between the two men:

10 August. I have speculated with Mr Helmont. His explanations of Holy Scripture are frequently admirable; amongst them appear some good ideas with which I am in agreement. About these, we have talked almost the whole afternoon. On "metempsychosis" I did not get to hear a sufficient proof.

16 August. I have been in the study of the Duchess. I conversed for some hours with Mr Helmont about his ideas, where I met not a few good ones, with which I am in agreement; many other ideas seem dubious to me; above all some interpretations of Holy Scripture do not please me. His intention and sentiments I find good and praiseworthy; also his serenity must be highly praised.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Leibniz announces the arrival of van Helmont for this second visit in a letter to Johan Chuno of 2 June 1696: see OK, ii, 898. In his diary entry of 13 September, he notes van Helmont's departure, Pe, p. 213.

<sup>73</sup> A, i, xii, 636.

<sup>74</sup> Pe, p. 198.



In the entry covering the days from 1 to 7 September, after a remark about their conversations, Leibniz writes that "I have written with him [van Helmont] some pages".<sup>75</sup>

With the draft version written down by the time of van Helmont's departure on 13 September, Leibniz had until the following Spring to produce his MS version for publication, since in the letter from van Helmont to Leibniz of 1/11 March 1697, already referred to, van Helmont asks Leibniz to translate the preface for *Thoughts*, and that he does so within three weeks as he, van Helmont, is intending to go to Amsterdam to see the publisher.

Van Helmont had said of the assistant (George Keith) who had helped him produce the *Two Hundred Queries*, that following his dictation, Keith "afterwards (retaining the Sence) put it in another Method, he also adding to it several things of his own".<sup>76</sup> Buchius writes a similar thing in the preface to the *Divine Being* concerning the way he produced that book from his conversation-dictation with van Helmont. Leibniz seems to have been familiar with the parameters acceptable to van Helmont within which a co-writer could express van Helmont's utterances. In his letter to von der Hardt, in which Leibniz hopes that someone could be found to arrange van Helmont's ideas on Genesis, he goes on to say that

it is not necessary that he who offers to do it, follows the opinions of the man; it is enough that he does not contradict him and expresses the affirmations of the man.<sup>77</sup>

Leibniz himself, when he came to produce the MS version of *Thoughts*, states that he worked according to this licence. Leibniz takes van Helmont's opinions that he

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>76</sup> *Paradoxal Discourses*, part 2, p. 159.

<sup>77</sup> A, 1, xii, 636.

recorded in the draft set of notes and expresses them such that they might be more acceptable (either to himself or to those readers Leibniz envisages for the book). As he notes on the page at the start of the *Thoughts* dossier: "Although I wanted to express the opinions of my friend, nevertheless I have often taken good care that they might admit a tolerable sense." He goes on in the next sentence to say: "Also I added many of my own thoughts <which differ from some> do not differ from some opinions of my friend", (where the phrase in brackets was crossed out by Leibniz).<sup>78</sup> I think it is a moot point whether we should take Leibniz's alteration of this sentence at face value or not. If "differ" is taken to mean only difference of *expression*, such that Leibniz's additions do not contradict van Helmont's ideas, then Leibniz might have corrected his sentence in the way he has. On the other hand, if "differ" is taken to mean difference of *idea*, such that Leibniz was misrepresenting van Helmont, then he might still have altered the sentence, this time in order not to admit what he has done. Leibniz does not explicitly state in the MS where he has modified the draft. In order to isolate instances where Leibniz has added to the text, or modified van Helmont's expressions, it has been necessary to compare carefully the draft and MS versions.<sup>79</sup> I have found no instances where Leibniz has modified van Helmont's words, or added passages of his own, such that a meaning is given which is contrary to what van Helmont believed: a result based both on the thoughts expressed in the draft and one's own knowledge of the Helmontian doctrine. Where Leibniz has modified van Helmont's expressions by introducing nomenclature or turns of phrases characteristic of his own writings; or, especially, where he has added passages whose meaning concurs with his own philosophy, then Leibniz can be considered to be

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<sup>78</sup> OH, I, 38; LH I, V, 2g, fol. 33. Grua did not include the phrase in brackets which Leibniz had crossed out, and he omitted the negation of the final phrase. See Gr, i, 98.

<sup>79</sup> Orio de Miguel notes some important additions made, OH, I, 75-77; and in his transcription of the draft, he includes many footnotes where the MS or published versions deviate, OH, I, 82-137.



speaking *propria voce*. These instances will be drawn on in Part 2 where they will be used to corroborate specific occasions of convergence in the cosmologies of Leibniz and van Helmont, and to draw parallels with the Helmontian symbology.

Finally, it should be noted that Leibniz sought to conceal his involvement in the writing of *Thoughts*. The year after it was published, Leibniz mentions the book in a letter to André Morell of 29 September 1698. He implies that he has had nothing whatsoever to do with it, other than receiving a copy, and he mentions something spurious about its publication, and more generally distances himself from the book:

He (Helmont) has given me a copy of his book on the beginning of Genesis... I remember that he told me that M. Wetstein in Amsterdam printed it in Latin from an English version.<sup>80</sup>

Later, in March 1701, Leibniz writes to Daniel Jablonski that

When he [van Helmont] prepared his *Thoughts* on the first four chapters of Genesis, recently published, while staying here with us, I provided him with books and advised him.<sup>81</sup>

But we know that Leibniz did much more than that.

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<sup>80</sup> Gr. I, 140. Leibniz also refers to the work as van Helmont's (alone) in a review written in 1701, Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 116.

<sup>81</sup> *Sammlung einiger Vertrauten Briefe Jablonski an Leibniz*, ed. by J. Kappens (Leipzig, 1754), pp. 259-60.

## 2.4 Leibniz and *Elucidarius Cabalisticus*

There is one further text on kabbalistic cosmology which was read by Leibniz and to which he made extensive critical remarks. This was *Elucidarius cabalisticus* by J.G. Wachter.

Wachter was a philosopher and theologian, versed in the Kabbalah. In 1699 he had published a book entitled *Der spinozismus im Judenthumb, oder die von dem heutiger Judenthumb und dessen geheimen kabbala vergotterte Welt*. This translates as "Spinozism in Judaism, or contemporary Judaism, or the pantheistic world of contemporary Jews and their secret Kabbalah". In this book Wachter attacks Spinoza and Kabbalah for their pantheism, as he saw it. *Elucidarius cabalisticus seu de Recondita Hebraeorum philosophia* of 1706 represents a U-turn in this opinion, for, as Leibniz himself notes,

It then appeared to him [Wachter] that he understood the matter better. Now, therefore, he defends the Cabbala of the Hebrews and Spinoza; and shows that they distinguish God and the world <sup>82</sup>

The book was also intended to be an explication of kabbalistic doctrine, and to show how Spinoza's philosophy was indebted to it.

*Elucidarius cabalisticus* contains a preface and five chapters, covering the origin of Kabbalah, its propagation, its doctrine, its supposed agreement with Spinoza and

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<sup>82</sup> B, pp. 1-2. Leibniz's remarks on *Elucidarius cabalisticus* were first published in *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza par Leibniz*, ed. by A. Foucher de Careil (Paris: Librairie philosophique de Ladrangue, 1854) and which appeared in English in *A Refutation Recently Discovered of Spinoza by Leibnitz*, trans. by Octavius Freire Owen (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1855). This is reproduced in *Spinoza: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Discussions*, ed. by Wayne Boucher, 6 vols (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999), 1, 93-101. At 1, 97, however, a fragment is missing, and the reader must consult Wn, pp. 489-490.



what "should be understood" about it. In the preface, in which Wachter sets out his aims, he states that Spinoza follows the "ancient philosophy of the Jews", and mentions how he had met Moses Germanus, the Augustine monk who had assisted in the production of the *Kabbala Denudata*.

Leibniz read the book sometime after 1706.<sup>83</sup> As is evident from Leibniz's remarks, he read the work right through, making notes on Wachter's claims, on the exposition of Kabbalah offered, and on the propositions quoted from Spinoza. Critical remarks are mostly reserved for points advanced by Wachter and for the doctrine of Spinoza. It is not clear from what Leibniz has written, what are his own remarks and what are merely notes on what he has read. However, by carefully examining his remarks and comparing them with Wachter's text, I have been able to distinguish Leibniz from Wachter.

### *Summary*

All the texts which Leibniz read, along with his involvement in *Thoughts on Genesis*, and his numerous discussions with van Helmont and von Rosenroth, would have provided him with a sufficient understanding of the cosmology of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. The similarities and differences that will be drawn out in Part 2 between the doctrines of Leibniz and the kabbalists will be corroborated by referring to Leibniz's own critical remarks (especially those he wrote on the *Seder Olam* and *Elucidarius Cabbalisticus*) and to the modifications he made to the draft of *Thoughts on Genesis*.

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<sup>83</sup> B, p. 1.

This chapter has shown that not only was Leibniz familiar with the writings of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, but that he had had long-standing acquaintanceships with its two chief exponents, and, further, that he had collaborated with van Helmont on his last work, *Thoughts on Genesis*. I have already mentioned in the Introduction, anticipating the work of part 2, that the similarities of the cosmological doctrines of Leibniz and the kabbalists should not be taken as evidence of (conceptual) influence by the latter on the former, since the Leibnizian principles can be discerned in his philosophy long before he had had significant knowledge of their ideas. This being the case, Leibniz's undoubted interest and involvement in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah still stands in need of an explanation. I have proposed that this interest of Leibniz in mystical writings should be understood in terms of his over-riding programme for using philosophy as a means to effecting social peace by harmonizing the religions. Whilst it is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis to treat this aspect at length, it is appropriate to deal with it insofar as it pertains to Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, in particular, insofar as a similar programme had motivated the kabbalists themselves. The religious harmonizing of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, and Leibniz's reaction to it, is, therefore, the subject of the next chapter.



### Chapter 3 Leibniz and the Religious Harmonizing of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah

It was in 1649 that Prince Christian August took over the rulership of Sulzbach. Soon after he was joined by van Helmont, who was to act as his adviser.<sup>1</sup> Both men were strongly motivated towards the "public good": to enact policies designed to bring about lasting peace. Following the recent horrors of the Thirty Years War, the result of religious differences, the drive to establish peace accordingly sought to effect itself precisely by overcoming these differences. Under the influence of van Helmont, Christian August's policies were determined to a great extent by theological principles. The way forward was to show that the religions were only superficially different: that fundamentally they were united. If this could be done, it would not matter if people belonged to different sects, for they would all share the same basic set of beliefs. At the least, they would have no need to fight each other.

Practical religious harmonizing began in the officially Lutheran court of Christian August with the inclusion of Catholics, members of the various Protestant sects, Jew, and even kabbalists, mystics and theosophists. It seems that it was van Helmont himself who recruited these people from among the various circles he moved in. Von Rosenroth was one such recruit, having initially met van Helmont through Mennonite and Quaker groups.<sup>2</sup>

But the religious differences that the court at Sulzbach was striving to overcome, soon became an obstacle in themselves in the form of Philip Wilhelm (whose higher rule included that of his cousin's, Christian August) and of the Catholic church itself. Both were alarmed at the "heretical" and "judaizing" developments taking place in

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of developments at Sulzbach, see Allison Coudert "The *Kabbala Denudata*: Converting Jews or Seducing Christians?", in *Christian-Jews and Jewish-Christians*, ed. R.H. Popkin and G.M. Weiner (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Allison Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah*, p. 100.

Sulzbach. Philip Wilhelm, (correctly) attributing the bad influence to van Helmont, worked hard, and finally succeeded, in getting him made a prisoner of the Inquisition in 1662.<sup>3</sup> Van Helmont was detained in Rome for a year before being released, whereon he resumed his activities unabated.

It was as a prisoner in Rome that van Helmont wrote his first book, the *Alphabeti vere naturalis*, which utilizes one of the modes by which it was hoped that religious differences might be overcome.

Another way of doing this found its literary apotheosis in the *Kabbala Denudata*. This was driven for the most part by the zeal of von Rosenroth, who worked on it throughout the 1670s and early 1680s. It was during this time that van Helmont was at Ragley Hall, where he, as well as Henry More and Anne Conway, collaborated at a distance with von Rosenroth on the *Kabbala Denudata*.

Although Henry More wrote a number of essays critical of aspects of Kabbalah, and which were included in the *Kabbala Denudata*, he did share some of the hopes of van Helmont and von Rosenroth that Kabbalah could be an instrument for bringing about religious harmony. He believed that it could be used for converting Jews. Indeed, in his own *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, he thought he had discovered through the kabbalistic interpretation of Genesis, proof of the validity of the Christian Trinity.

In addition, both van Helmont and Conway produced their own publications whose methods represented a third way for effecting religious harmony and which was distinct from those of the *Kabbala Denudata* and van Helmont's early *Alphabeti*.

I noted in the Introduction that Leibniz was motivated to work on metaphysics by his own desire to try to effect social peace by means of harmonizing the religions. This same motivation in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah explains one of the attractions it

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<sup>3</sup> Allison Coudert, "The *Kabbala Denudata*", p. 77.



had for him. Within each of these three ways for effecting religious harmony it will be useful to identify i) what was supposed to be the source of truth and "epistemological" basis from which "aberrant" and schismatic interpretations could be corrected; ii) the method for effecting this correction in a persuasive ecumenical way; iii) exemplary texts; and iv) how each relates to Leibniz's own efforts.

### 3.1 Natural Language Recovery

In his first book, the *Alphabeti vere naturalis*, van Helmont concluded that there had once existed an original Hebrew language, by means of which God had originally communicated to man.<sup>4</sup> This original language had altered and the modern Hebrew, Greek and Latin versions of Scripture contained corruptions of the original meaning. These corruptions were the cause of arguments over what the divine message really was, which in its turn, had led not only to the three separate religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also to the schisms within each, most notably that of Catholicism and Protestantism. If there had been an original language of Scripture then religious differences would be surmounted by recovering that original language along with its singular and incontrovertible meanings.

In the *Alphabeti*, van Helmont presents his theory and method for recovering the original Hebrew. It was his belief that the Hebrew language should be pronounced by matching the shape of the tongue with that of the letter in its utterance. The *Alphabeti* contains detailed cross-section diagrams of the speaking parts. The sound which

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<sup>4</sup> The *Alphabeti* is discussed in Allison Coudert, "Some Theories of a Natural Language", pp. 56-91; and in her *Impact of the Kabbalah*, pp. 58-75.

emerges is used to determine the true meaning of each letter. Van Helmont "recovers" the original meanings of all the Hebrew letters in this way.

Leibniz read the *Alphabeti* in the same year that it was published, 1667. And he surely believed, as do most Christians, that God had directly communicated to some of his creatures, for example, Adam and Moses: that the original meanings of Scripture had been communicated by a language common both to God and to the men to whom they were revealed. This implies that man (or some elect few) had once possessed this divine or "Adamic" language. If this language could be recovered, then not only would the true meaning of the revelation be established, which would solve the vicious disputes that had arisen from the various interpretations, but, since the divine language is at the same time a perfectly rational one, that once and for all established meaning would have to be accepted by all peoples on account of its logical rigour:

Where this language can once be introduced by missionaries, the true religion, which is in complete agreement with reason, will be established, and apostasy will no more be feared in the future than would an apostasy of men from arithmetic or geometry which they have once learned.<sup>5</sup>

But it was not the case that this original language was just a medium by which man had received the divine words: rather, it was the language of nature, that is, its words express the essences of things, and was the actual language used by God himself. The notion of a natural and divine language was mooted by Plato in the *Cratylus*, though he doubted whether such a thing could ever be constructed by human beings. However, neo-Platonists, such as Plotinus and Iamblichus did affirm its existence, as

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<sup>5</sup> Circa 1679, in L, p. 225.



did Origen and Philo. It was again revived during the Renaissance, when the magical aspects were stressed and combined with kabbalistic ideas, by, for example, Ficino, Pico, Reuchlin and Agrippa.<sup>6</sup>

This means, and it is implicit in the *Alphabeti*, that, since the words of things in a true, real and natural language are identical to the essential attributes of things, when God utilized his language and spoke, what came forth were not merely sounds (sounds representing things) but things themselves: that is, when God speaks he creates.

This natural language theory has the same basis in Platonic epistemology as does Leibniz's theory of the universal science.<sup>7</sup> I will discuss this in Chapter 4. The above circa 1679 quotation from Leibniz, that a natural language would serve the programme of religious harmonizing, clearly belongs to the period when Leibniz still thought that a universal science was possible. But when this project was abandoned in the early 1680s, its underlying cosmological beliefs that the world was rationally ordered by God and created by a natural language process, were not abandoned. Like cosmology in general, the natural language theory passed into the realm of the transcendental: Leibniz continued to assert its existence, yet at the same time deny its attainability by the finite mind. The implication is that an Adamic language which is unattainable in principle, is not one which can be recovered in the way that van Helmont had hoped for, and so could not serve as the epistemological basis from which schismatic interpretations of Scripture could be resolved. It seems clear, therefore, that while the notion of an Adamic language is an important aspect of

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<sup>6</sup> See Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, chapter 1; and Coudert, "Some Theories of a Natural Language", pp. 74-91.

<sup>7</sup> The emergence of universal sciences or general characteristics out of earlier occult systems is discussed by Paolo Rossi, *Clavis Universalis* (Milan, 1960) and Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

Leibniz's epistemological, cosmological and theological ideas, it has no role to play in Leibniz's programme of religious harmonizing after the early 1680s.

### 3.2 *Prisca Theologia*

For centuries, Jewish kabbalists had held the belief that the *Zohar*, the central work of Kabbalah, was a *Prisca Theologia* text: that is, like the *Hermetica*, was thought to contain wisdom which had been imparted to Moses on Mount Sinai, and which was not written down in the Bible, but was, rather, transmitted down through the ages by word of mouth, before being written down as a *Prisca* text. "Kabbalah" is itself the Hebrew word for "tradition". The Christian cabbalists of the Renaissance, for example, Pico della Mirandola, Guillaume Postel, Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella, had used Kabbalah as "proof" that the original word of God was in fact that of the Christian doctrine, since it proved not only that Jesus was the Messiah, but also the validity of the Trinity of God as both one and many. Von Rosenroth and van Helmont both subscribed to this belief.

It was by the direct juxtapositioning of the New Testament with kabbalistic texts, and by expositions of their conceptual similarities, that the truth of Christianity would be made plain. This particular mode of ecumenicalism was most fervently developed by von Rosenroth in his *Kabbala Denudata*: indeed, it was his life's work. In this book von Rosenroth makes it clear that he regards the *Zohar* as a *Prisca Theologia* text:

It... occurred to me that I should hunt out that same ancient philosophy which flourished at the time of Christ and the Apostles and which appears to have flowed from the stream of the sacred oracles. As I was about to examine those ancient opinions about God and other spiritual and theological matters, I fell



upon this most ancient book of the Jews, which is called the Sohar, or Book of Splendour.<sup>8</sup>

The book contains three texts from the *Zohar*, the *Sifra de Zeni'uta*, the *Idra Rabba* and the *Idra Zuta*. They form the "epistemological" basis for the entire project, on account of their supposed *Prisca Theologia* origins.

In the preface to the second tome von Rosenroth explains that it is by a comparison of the concepts and terms in the *Zohar* with those in the *New Testament* that the essential similarity of the two teachings can be shown:

I persevered with one aim alone, that I might be of service to you, so that the knowledge of Hebrew matters should no longer be concerned with mere ritual, still less with grammar, but should reach to the things themselves which should then be compared with the phrases and doctrines of the new covenant to see if by chance by this means it would be possible to facilitate the conversion of the Jewish race to the faith of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

In the next item, the *Mareh Kohen*, a synopsis of the *Zohar*, von Rosenroth inserted copiously throughout the text parallels to the New Testament.

The *Kabbala Denudata* also contains contributions from other authors who set about drawing comparisons between Kabbalah and Christianity. One such item by Henry More explores the similarities between Kabbalah, specifically the doctrine of the *sefirot*, and Scripture, as well as Platonism.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* is an extensive paralleling of Kabbalah, particularly in its Lurianic form, with the New Testament. Throughout this work the *Adam Kadmon* of the kabbalists is specifically identified with Christ; and chapter 3 sets out in great detail no less than twenty four aspects of Adam Kadmon which it directly relates to

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<sup>8</sup> Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah*, p. 114; *Kabbala Denudata*, 1, 2, 3-4. See also, for example, *Kabbala Denudata* 1, 1, 1-30 *passim*; 1, 2, 43-44.

<sup>9</sup> Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah*, p. 107; *Kabbala Denudata*, 2, 1, 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> 1, 2, 14-27.

Christ. The subtitle of the work makes explicit its ecumenicalist aims: *Short Application of the Cabbalistic Doctrine of the Hebrews to the teaching of the New Testament; for advancing the aim of the conversion of the Jews.*<sup>11</sup>

Von Rosenroth had underwritten his entire project with the belief that the *Zohar* was a *Prisca Theologia* text, which would serve as the (ultimately divine) authority for his "transcendental, metaphysical and theological" system. Initially, following his meeting with von Rosenroth at Sulzbach in 1688, Leibniz was enthused by what the project might achieve:

[Von Rosenroth] has established many Christian truths. For it appears that the traditions of the ancients give proof of the existence of Christ... They observe magnificent things about the Messiah as being beyond the measure of a human being.<sup>12</sup>

But although Leibniz appeared to believe in a weak *Prisca* (his undoubting acceptance of Plato and Aristotle), he eventually expressed doubts concerning the alleged antiquity of Kabbalah. In a letter to Bourguet in 1707, he praises von Rosenroth's work, but implies a certain scepticism of his own regarding its supposed origins:

To him [von Rosenroth] the cabala of the Hebrews seemed a type of a certain more sublime metaphysics, and what he breathes into that subject should not be scorned. And although the doctrine had *perhaps not entered at the dawn of the Hebrews*, nonetheless I applaud his extensive and full interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The original Latin is: *Brevis Applicatio Doctrinae Hebraeorum Cabbalisticae ad Dogmata Novi Foederis; pro Formanda Hypothesi, ad Conversionem Judaeorum Proficua.*

<sup>12</sup> To Gerhardt Molanus, 1688, in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 48; A, I, V, 109. See also letter to Hessen-Rheinfels, 20 January 1688, in *ibid.*, p. 47; A, I, V, 43: "[Von Rosenroth] has found some excellent things concerning the Messiah which the modern Jews do not know about or try to suppress or turn away from their meaning... Many still make fun of such undertakings, but I think otherwise."

<sup>13</sup> 15 December 1707, in G, iii, 546. My italics.



However, when Leibniz is not acclaiming von Rosenroth, he is more forthright about his doubts concerning Kabbalah as a source of truth:

The opinions and expressions of these ancient Hebrew Cabalists cannot be taken as solid proof, although some people do imagine that they represent the traditions of Moses and the ancient sages since in effect *cabala* signifies *tradition*.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3 Rationalizing the Exoteric

Rather than relying on revealed truth, either as having been illuminated by newly discovered *Prisca* texts, or as having been corrected by language recovery techniques, a third strain to effect harmony between religious differences was founded on truth by reason. Rational philosophy could be used, not to replace truth by revelation, but to bridge the destructive chasms that had opened up between the various interpretations of that revelation. This strain of religious harmonizing involves a philosophical doctrine, conceived as epistemological basis, and whose concepts must be shown to agree with those fundamentally present in religious writings. Any such individual treatise may seek to underwrite a plurality of writings from different religions or just concentrate on grounding one particular religion. Sometimes the rational doctrine is dominant in the presentation, with similarities to the religious doctrine being made secondary: this is the case with Anne Conway's *Principles*. Other treatises, such as van Helmont's *Thoughts on Genesis* and *A Paraphrastical Exposition* start with the

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<sup>14</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 59; FoL, p. 47.

religious doctrine, here the Book of Genesis, and draw comparisons with an underlying philosophy. Either way, the methodology of religious harmonizing rests on the distinction between what I have termed the esoteric mode (rational philosophical) and the exoteric mode (revelation religion).

The *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* is predominantly given over to an exposition of Anne Conway's Platonic vitalist philosophy. The overall aims of religious harmonizing in this work are made plain in the pre-amble to the first chapter, where Conway states how her metaphysical exposition of the nature of God and his attributes will

Show how the Trinity could be conceived in God according to Scripture so that Jews, Turks, or other peoples would not be offended, if these words, "three distinct persons", which are not in Scripture and have no reasonable sense, are omitted.<sup>15</sup>

The editor, either van Helmont or von Rosenroth, has supplied references in Conway's text i) to the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*, which effectively relates her philosophy to the syncretism of Christianity and Kabbalah; and ii) to the *Porta Coelorum* and the *Druschim*, also in the *Kabbala Denudata*, which relates her doctrine specifically to Lurianic Kabbalah.

The *Principles* discusses the nature of God and his role in creation, and deals with the concept of time, the freedom of God's will, and the necessity of a creative *ens medium*, which she argues does not imply pantheism. She writes that the nature of the relationship of spirit and body is not that of the doctrine of Descartes (nor that of

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<sup>15</sup> *Principles*, p. 9. See Coudert's introduction, pp. xvii-xviii: "The entire point of Lady Conway's critique of Descartes, and indeed of any philosophy she deemed materialistic, was to provide a secure foundation for an ecumenical religion uniting Christian, Jew, Moslem, and pagan in loving worship of a merciful and benevolent God. Her treatise provides an excellent example of how difficult it was to build the foundation for such a universal and tolerant religion on Christian foundations."



Henry More) but rather that spirit and body exist on a single spirit continuum. There is a section at the end of the first chapter, entitled "Annotations", in which her philosophical account is compared to Lurianic creation theory, including the Christian kabbalistic equation of *Adam Kadmon* with Christ. References to New and Old Testaments are given throughout.

Of particular interest is Conway's argument for the existence of an *ens medium* between God and his creatures.<sup>16</sup> Conway argues that this *ens medium* is Christ; is to be equated to *Adam Kadmon* of the kabbalists; and is a key concept in the programme of religious harmonizing:

In addition to the two extremes there is also a certain mediator which partakes of both, and this is Jesus Christ, whom the wiser among the Jews recognize, no less than some among the so-called Gentiles, maintaining that there is such a mediator, which they call by different names such as Logos, Son of God, first-born Son of God, Wisdom, the Celestial Adam, etc. And, thus, they also call him the eternal mediator.

If these matters are correctly considered, they will contribute greatly to the propagation of the true faith and Christian religion among Jews and Turks and other infidel nations; if, namely, it is agreed that there are equally strong reasons by which we can prove that there is a mediator between God and human beings, indeed, between God and all creatures, as there are for proving that there is a God and creation. Therefore, those who acknowledge such a mediator and believe in him can be said truly to believe in Jesus Christ, even though they do not yet know it and are not convinced that he has already come in the flesh. But if they first grant that there is a mediator, they will indubitably come to acknowledge also, even if they are unwilling, that Christ is that mediator.<sup>17</sup>

The evidence strongly suggests that Leibniz had read Conway's work by Spring 1697; but he has left no comments regarding the references in her text that make parallels with the theologies of Kabbalah and Christianity.

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<sup>16</sup> This will be an especially important issue in my comparison of Leibniz's cosmology with that of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah.

<sup>17</sup> *Principles*, pp. 31-32.

In van Helmont's draft of *Thoughts on Genesis* we find a philosophical doctrine that is a distillation of all his previous works, and which may be described as Hermetico-alchemico-kabbalistico-theosophical. The structure of *Thoughts* is simple. Working through the verses of the first four chapters of Genesis, van Helmont unfolds an interpretation according to his doctrine, which is presented, for the most part, as an (esoteric) commentary inserted between the biblical words or sentences. At times, the meanings of individual letters are derived by the same technique of linguistic analysis pioneered in the *Alphabeti*. A much briefer biblical exposition had been done in van Helmont's *A Paraphrastical Exposition* of 1682. This, however, covered only the first chapter and the beginning of the second, and was done without any linguistic analysis.

By carrying out the editing and modifying of van Helmont's draft for *Thoughts on Genesis*, as well as adding ideas from his own philosophy, Leibniz was himself engaged in this third strain of religious harmonizing. Moreover, as I have already proposed, the grounding of theological writings in philosophical doctrine is precisely that mode of religious harmonizing which Leibniz pursued himself. In a highly significant passage which Leibniz *added himself* to van Helmont's draft, but later omitted from the version to be published, he makes it abundantly clear that he regards the account in Genesis as a merely *exoteric* one.<sup>18</sup> This is because "in such a work [Genesis] there is nothing of reason or wisdom that can be understood". To interpret Genesis literally would be childish:

[Moses's] interpreters, having been submerged in crass images, understood nothing more of the sublime than boys who contemplate a coloured picture of creation and paradise, where various animals run across the plains; and a man

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<sup>18</sup> Orio de Miguel notes that, unlike the rest of the draft which was taken down hurriedly "by mouth" from van Helmont, the handwriting of this passage is carefully written and has not been corrected. It also appears on its own leaf separate from the rest of the draft. OH, I, 82.



is in a certain well-watered garden with his wife standing under a fruitful tree...Nor do they think better, who understand the six days as restricted to twenty four hour [periods].

Therefore:

When Moses, at the start of his work, relates the genesis or origin of things, one or the other is necessary: either it says false and empty things, or it contains great mysteries.

The "mysteries" are the truths enshrined in an esoteric philosophy in which there *is* something "of reason and wisdom that can be understood", and which lies under the exoteric words of Scripture. Hence, Leibniz finishes the passage with the words: "For long, therefore, wise men decided to hide many other things under this covering of words."<sup>19</sup>

George MacDonald Ross has noted that Leibniz's involvement in *Thoughts on Genesis* indicates the extent to which he was prepared to treat Scripture as mere metaphor:

It is hard to credit that Leibniz would have had anything to do with such an enterprise, however anonymously, unless he believed that it was legitimate to treat the creation story as myth --that is, as literally being false, but conveying a deeper truth to the initiated.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The passage in its entirety reads thus: "When Moses, at the start of his work, relates the genesis or origin of things, one or the other is necessary: either it says false and empty things, or it contains great mysteries. However, many of his interpreters, having been submerged in crass images, understood nothing more of the sublime than boys who contemplate a coloured picture of creation and paradise, where various animals run across the plains; and a man is in a certain well-watered garden with his wife standing under a fruitful tree, of which a serpent occasionally encircles its trunk and harangues the wife. Nor do they think better, who understand the six days as restricted to twenty four hour [periods], and suppose the first to be light, the second earth, the third plants, the fourth sun and moon, the fifth aquatic things, the sixth terrestrial animals with the emerging of man, not observing that in such a work there is nothing of reason or wisdom that can be understood. For long, therefore, wise men decided to hide many other things under this covering of words." OH, I, 82; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 34.

<sup>20</sup> "Leibniz and the Origin of Things", in M. Dascal and E. Yakira (eds.), *Leibniz and Adam* (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects Ltd., 1993) pp. 241-257 (p. 242).

## *Summary*

In this chapter attention has been paid to the programme of religious harmonizing that drove the Christian Lurianic kabbalists, a programme that was also shared by Leibniz. Two of the methods for effecting this that can be discerned amongst their writings, that of natural language recovery and *Prisca Theologia*, were rejected by Leibniz. However, the third method of grounding exoteric texts such as Scripture or Kabbalah in a common *philosophical* doctrine, was the method employed by Leibniz himself. This accounts for his willingness to be involved in *Thoughts on Genesis* given that, as shall become evident in part 2, the content of that work (the ideas of van Helmont) was not a source of conceptual inspiration in itself.

The work of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah to try to connect together two religious doctrines, that of Christianity and Jewish Kabbalah, is what initially attracted Leibniz to learn more about it. But, precisely because he did not find there any novel ideas of a fundamental kind, his interest was rather sustained by a curiosity to see to what extent those writings might be founded on his own metaphysical principles. Hence Leibniz's general interest in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, and his particular involvement in *Thoughts on Genesis*, concerned both their programme of religious harmonizing and the content of their ideas insofar as they might relate to his own..

The extent to which Leibniz's ideas on cosmology are proximate to those of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah will be examined in part 2; a process which will, at the same time, serve to illuminate aspects of his own cosmology.



## PART 2 LEIBNIZ'S COSMOLOGY AND ITS PARALLELS WITH MYSTICAL KABBALAH

### Chapter 4 The Rational Foundations of Cosmology

For Leibniz, a proposition is true when it is incontrovertible, or, that what it asserts cannot be otherwise. But it is not enough to simply *insist* that what a proposition asserts is necessarily the way it is and could not have been otherwise, as if it were its own guarantor of indubitability and therefore of truth: "brute" facts or statements are not admissible. Rather, for any proposition, the question "Why?" must be asked of it. For whatever answers are proposed for the key cosmological questions (the whats and the hows of the nature and origin of the universe) each must be asked the question "Why?". Why is the nature of the universe as it is and not otherwise? Why even does it exist at all? Why is there a beginning to it (if it has one)? Why does it change (if it does)? And why as it does? When all these questions have been answered, then the truths about the ultimate nature of the universe shall have been revealed. For the answer to a "why" is a demonstration of the truth of a proposition, it is the guarantee that what it asserts is necessarily the way it is, and consequently is incontrovertible: it is what Leibniz calls the sufficient reason: "We consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise".<sup>1</sup>

Having set out the conditions for true propositions, in terms of whys and sufficient reasons, it must now be stated in what way these latter serve as demonstrations of truth. For Leibniz, a proposition is demonstrated as true when it is shown that it is

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<sup>1</sup> *Monadology*, section 32, in AG, p. 217. See also *Principles of Nature and Grace*, section 7, in AG, p. 210: "Nothing takes place without a sufficient reason... Assuming this principle, the first question we have the right to ask will be, *why is there something rather than nothing?*... Furthermore, assuming that things must exist, we must be able to give a reason for *why they must exist in this way, and not otherwise.*"

necessarily derived from an idea whose truth is self-evident, what he calls simple ideas. The method for establishing necessary connections to these fundamental truths is effected by analysing the concepts included in the propositions, in the same way that theorems are reduced to definitions and axioms in mathematics. This process, referred to at other times by Leibniz as the geometrical method, is the Scholastic principle of “*predicatum inest subiecto*”: that in every true proposition the notion of the predicate is included in that of the subject.

The simple ideas, to which analysis seeks to reduce propositions, are identities, e.g.  $A=A$ , and they are self-evidently true, or without need of further proof, by virtue of Leibniz’s principle of contradiction, which essentially defines propositions of identity as true ones, and propositions of contradiction, e.g.  $A\neq A$ , as false ones. And this principle must be accepted, since if contradictory propositions were called true, and identical ones false, there would be no convention for the meaning of truth, and so the utility of propositions as truth-bearing would be destroyed, allowing anyone to say whatever he liked, yet in vain, i.e. without any authority of “truth”. If the rational approach to the understanding of the world is to be pursued then propositions must be supplied with sufficient reasons, or answers as to why they must necessarily be so. In the case of simple notions this is provided by the principle of contradiction, which simply defines them as true; in the case of complex notions, it is provided by showing how they are derived from simples, a derivation consisting of steps, each of which is necessarily connected to the prior one, or, each step has the sufficient reason for its truth located in the antecedent one. This is effected by the substitution of identical terms (Leibniz’s Law) until the self-evident simple notions are reached. For example, the proposition  $A=C$  has the sufficient reason for its truth located in the simple definition  $A=B$ ,  $B=C$ , by substituting accordingly.



When a truth is necessary, its reason can be found by analysis, resolving it into simpler ideas and simpler truths until we reach the primitives... which cannot be proved and which need no proof. And these are *identical propositions*, whose opposite contains an explicit contradiction.<sup>2</sup>

The nature of rational understanding as I have so far described it, relates to what Leibniz calls propositions of reasoning, that is, abstract entities of a mathematical or geometrical kind. Now, cosmology is concerned with facts of existence for an understanding of the world; and since Leibniz demands that understanding be rational, he is forced to apply the principle of sufficient reason to propositions applied to the world. Whereas the sufficient reason for an *abstract* mathematical proposition provides a demonstration of the necessary *truth* of that proposition, in the case of propositions about *existent* things or states, the sufficient reason provides a demonstration of the necessary *reality* or *actuality* of the thing proposed, i.e. shows indubitably why a thing exists rather than not, and why it exists as it does and not otherwise. The provision of such a sufficient reason means in effect that a proposition about the world must be reducible, in necessarily connected steps, to those primitive entities which stand in need of no further proof. Since these primitives underwrite the reality of their derivative complex propositions, what stands in need of no further proof with these is their reality. This is an extension of the *predicatum inest subiecto* principle beyond its traditional restriction to mere abstracts, now applied to the actual world.<sup>3</sup>

In 1686 to Antoine Arnauld, Leibniz says:

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<sup>2</sup> *Monadology*, sections 33, 35, in AG, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> A discussion of Leibniz's early search for certainty is to be found in Brown, *Leibniz*, pp. 54-61. See also Rescher, *Leibniz: An Introduction to his Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), pp. 21-25. An extended investigation of Leibniz's epistemology is in Hildé Ishiguro, *Leibniz's Philosophy of Logic and Language* (London: Duckworth, 1972).

In every true affirmative proposition, whether necessary or contingent, universal or particular, the notion of the predicate is in some way included in that of the subject.<sup>4</sup>

Now the truths of contingent propositions are delivered by the sufficient reasons as to why a thing is as it is, or why it exists at all. These come in two sorts: the efficient cause and the final cause. Efficient causes explain why something is as it is in terms of the shapes and the motions of the things external to it: they are the order of physical causation of mechanical philosophy. Final causes, on the other hand, explain in terms of the inclinations and dispositions internal to the thing: they are the order of mental causation of animistic philosophy. But when a thing is conceived as a body it has not one or a few assignable efficient causes, but is as it is as a result of *all* the knock-on effects it has sustained throughout its history; and as each originating body of those myriad efficient causes acted as it did as a result of all the knock-on effects it had sustained, it soon becomes clear that reduction of contingent propositions to self-evident principles, by efficient causes, cannot be attained due to the vast size of the series of causes involved. The same problem pertains when things are conceived as minds, for the Leibnizian appetition is as it is not by virtue of one final cause, but is the apex, so to speak, of a myriad of *petites perceptions*, each of which has a myriad of final causes itself, and so on infinitely. Consequently, final as well as efficient causes cannot be used (by finite minds at least) to demonstrate the necessary truths of contingent propositions. And if they cannot provide the sufficient reason for why a single thing is as it is, how much less so for the universe as the totality of all things.

Leibniz has been termed, along with Descartes and Spinoza, as a rationalist: as one who believes that certain knowledge about the world is obtainable through logical

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<sup>4</sup> To Arnauld, 14 July 1686, in L, p. 337.



deduction based on indubitable truths of reason. In the late 1670s Leibniz had been engaged in such a rationalist enterprise: his project of a universal science, exemplified by his essay *On the General Characteristic*. Leibniz hoped this would establish, by the arithmetical method of analytical reduction of concepts, self-evident metaphysical principles, such as that for being.<sup>5</sup> But whereas the process of analytic reduction of propositions into simples by logically deductive steps could be effected for abstract propositions, it became clear in time to Leibniz that this could not be done for contingent propositions since there was not just one step to be demonstrated as a necessary antecedent reason, but an infinity of them. Though the deductive method was sound, any attempt to apply it to the purpose of discovering indubitable primitive metaphysical concepts was doomed because such a task would literally be endless. In the early 1680s Leibniz abandoned his dream of an attainable rationalism. As Nicholas Rescher observes, Leibniz's

Traditional ranking as a "Rationalist" is highly problematical. In his emphasis on the dependence of factual knowledge upon observation, his concerns for experimental design, and his views on the nature of hypotheses and the principles for their assignment, Leibniz is a rigorous empiricist.<sup>6</sup>

The fact is that Leibniz replaced his belief in an attainable rationalism with the belief that the only knowledge of the world attainable by human beings was that which was acquired empirically: and which was merely probabilistic. And yet, he did not abandon his belief in the principle of sufficient reason that *nihil est sine ratione*. Rather, it was the *working out by the human mind* of the sufficient reasons for a fact's being so and not otherwise that was abandoned: it was the possibility of certain

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<sup>5</sup> See Coudert, "Some Theories of a Natural Language", pp. 106-113; and Anna Tymieniecka, *Leibniz' Cosmological Synthesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1964), pp. 21-37.

<sup>6</sup> Rescher, p. 130.

knowledge of the world by the human mind that was abandoned. From then on, this was to be restricted to that mind alone which was capable of such ratiocination: the infinite mind of God. Leibniz subsequently asserts a dual epistemology. On the one hand there is the probabilistic knowledge of human epistemology through empirical science, and on the other, there is the certain knowledge of divine epistemology through rationalism, which, *sub specie mentis hominis*, is a *transcendental rationalism*. Leibniz does not become a full-blown sceptic in that, as a true disciple of Plato, he asserts that, though true knowledge is not actually attainable by man, it still exists -transcendentally, and that he can advance towards it. This serves for Leibniz as a "containment of scepticism". The epistemology he settles down to after the abandonment of universal science, is that of modern empirical science. Though a proposition can have no demonstrable ultimate truth value, nevertheless human theorizing can move towards the true knowledge which is assumed to exist transcendentally. This is seen to happen when the power of explanation or understanding of an hypothesis increases: what Leibniz calls an increase in distinctness. Such progress towards truth bestows "moral certainty", "probability" and "justification" on a belief. This type of pursuit of knowledge insists that the universe is still, in essence, thoroughly rational; for despite the admission that true knowledge can never actually be attained, it refuses to jettison, *in principle*, the notion that sufficient reasons exist in cosmology. And Leibniz is compelled to do this as long as he needs to believe that truth exists, even if it does so only as a humanly unrealizable goal, for it is presupposed by his notion of progress in understanding, and thus his desired containment of full-blown scepticism. That is, though progress



towards knowledge can only be carried out in the mode of empirical science, the notion of this progress itself presupposes the metaphysical.<sup>7</sup>

Cosmology, insofar as it is concerned with the *ultimate* nature and origin of the world, must, if it is to say anything at all, set forth certain knowledge about, for example, substance, force, matter, space, time, causality, etc. The evidence suggests that the principles of Leibniz's cosmology were in place by the early 1670s. But when certain knowledge became restricted to the divine realm after the early 1680s, it took cosmology with it. In contradistinction to modern empirical cosmology, the cosmology of Leibniz is an exercise in transcendental rationalism. This transcendental nature adds further to the esoteric or abstract rational quality of Leibniz's cosmology, and suggests a reason as to why explicit accounts of cosmological processes and events are few and far between in the corpus.

After the abandonment of universal science the discussion of things such as primitive existents and sufficient reasons for contingent propositions takes place in the spectral light of the transcendental, for these are things which are both admitted to be unknowable and yet also to be unavoidably pre-supposed, since the notion of progress in physics presupposes a truth theory, which in Leibniz is founded on the primitive existents, which must be presupposed to exist at the end of the reductive analysis of contingent propositions. Accordingly Leibniz describes these primitive metaphysical entities in terms of the principle of *predicatum inest subiecto*: in the same way that in true abstract propositions, predicates are contained in subjects, which are eventually reducible to the single ultimate subject of one identical proposition, so in true contingent propositions properties are reducible to a single

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<sup>7</sup> See Brown, *Leibniz*, pp. 4-5, 46.

ultimate subject, which is metaphysical substance. As Leibniz explains in the

*Discourse on Metaphysics*:

It is indeed true that when several predicates are attributed to a single subject and this subject is attributed to no other, it is called an individual substance... All true predication has some basis in the nature of things and that, when a proposition is not an identity, that is, when the predicate is not explicitly contained in the subject, it must be contained in it virtually.<sup>8</sup>

And in the same way that a primitive concept or axiom in mathematics is said to contain all the predicates that can be (logically) deduced from it, so the primitive existent or substance in Leibniz's metaphysics is said to contain all the predicates that can be deduced from it. In this sense the axiom or substance is referred to as the complete concept.

We can say that the notion of an individual substance or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed.<sup>9</sup>

And so it is seen that Leibniz's theory of substance is consequent on his theory of truth, since it is the supposition that there is an underlying truth to the world that allows progress towards knowledge (true propositions about the world) to be possible, which truth resides in primitive existents, or simple substances.

The explanation or reason as to why an existent has the attributes it has, is given in terms of its complete concept, its substance. But this explanation of things remains a partial one, for one might ask, as one must do if the rational process of explanation is not to be *irrationally* truncated, terminating in a brute fact: Why is this particular

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<sup>8</sup> Section 8, in AG, pp. 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. On Leibniz's use of the *inesse* principle in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, see Brown, *Leibniz*, pp. 107-111.



complete concept as it is? Why, even, does it exist at all? And for the universe as the totality of all complete concepts: Why is this collection as it is (when infinitely other arrangements are logically possible)? Why, even, does *any* complete concept of an individual substance exist? Only when there are no further whys to be asked will a full cosmology have been demonstrated. Yet, if it is irrational to terminate a series of sufficient reasons in a brute fact, it is no less irrational to allow the series to have no beginning or foundation. Leibniz's solution to this paradox is the notion of the ultimate sufficient reason. That is, the idea of a sufficient reason which explains every why concerning the universe, and which, at the same time, explains itself, or is its *own* sufficient reason.

When something has its sufficient reason located in another being which is logically prior to it, then that is precisely what is meant by being *contingent*: it is to depend on some other thing for its essence and existence. And when a being does *not* have its sufficient reason located in some other, then that is what is meant by *necessary* being: its existence and essence is independent (of any other being). This is the primary distinction between the universe and the ultimate sufficient reason.

Now, if simple substances, which are the fundamental and irreducible beings of the world, still stand in need of sufficient reasons themselves, then the universe of those substances and the things they constitute, cannot be that in which the determining reasons can be found. In short, if the universe is contingent, as it is, then the sufficient reason for it must lie in that whose nature is *not* contingent, that is, in that which is *necessary*; and it is in this sense that the ultimate sufficient reason is *transcendent* to the world.

And so, the ultimate reason for the reality of both essences and existences lies in one thing, which must of necessity be greater than the world, higher than

the world, and must have existed before the world did, since through it not only existing things, which make up the world, but also possibles have their reality.<sup>10</sup>

The transcendency here is not a spatial one in which the ultimate sufficient reason is located outside or above the universe; nor is it an ontological one in the sense of the ultimate sufficient reason being substantially other to the universe as some super-aetherealized mind. Though what these concepts mean in cosmological terms will be examined later, it must be emphasized that the transcendency here is the *logical* one of the distinction between the contingent and the necessary, or between that, the proposition of which requires sufficient reasons (the world), and that, the proposition of which does not (the ultimate sufficient reason).

Thus *the sufficient reason*, which needs no other reason, must be outside this series of contingent things, and must be found in a substance which is its cause, and which is a necessary being, carrying the reason of its existence with itself. Otherwise, we would not yet have a sufficient reason where one could end the series. And this ultimate reason for things is called *God*.<sup>11</sup>

### *Comparison*

A *religious Platonism* is at the bottom of the cosmology of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. I have already mentioned in Chapter 1 that neo-Platonism was the intellectual injection into Jewish mysticism that produced the kabbalistic schools of the twelfth century. Kabbalah, in its Lurianic form, was the principal source of the religious Platonism of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, though the rational Platonic

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<sup>10</sup> *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*, in AG, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> *Principles of Nature and Grace*, section 8, in AG, p. 210.



dimension was by now all but obscured. However, a few words concerning the notion of truth are to be found, and which clearly show the underlying presence of the Platonic system. In Anne Conway's *Principles* we are told that knowledge depends on the existence of real beings, which in its turn, depends on the existence of essential immutable natures:

If the essential nature of individuals could change one into another, it would follow that creatures would not have a true being inasmuch as we could not be certain of anything nor could we have true knowledge or understanding of anything... For all true science or certainty of knowledge depends on the truth of objects, which we commonly call objective truths. If these objective truths were interchangeable, then the truth of any statement made about the object would also change. Therefore no statement could be invariably true.<sup>12</sup>

Since God is the substance on whom all essences ultimately depend, for he is the necessary substance, it follows that truth is grounded in him: "If [a being] shares nothing of the communicable attributes of God, it will not be true or good and, consequently, will be an utter fiction."<sup>13</sup> And because it is God who is the ultimate ground of this rational world-system, the "word of God" flows from him in the same way as attributes, true by their rational entailment, flow from him. Thus, in a neo-Platonism of this sort, theology (the utterances of God) and philosophy (reason) are not antagonistic to each other, but, rather, they coincide, each having the same source. In the preface to *The Divine Being* the author criticizes the differences that some people perceive "these days" between theology and philosophy, in particular that they "affirm the one to be built upon quite other Grounds than the other". He argues instead that "upon my enquiry into the original of both Theology and Philosophy, I found them both to flow from one and the same spring, to wit, from the Divine

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<sup>12</sup> *Principles*, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Being": God is "the Author both of his Holy Word and of Reason, and all Natural things".

The notion of God as the self-existing ground of being is a feature of both doctrines of Leibniz and Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. Since both are grounded in Platonism it is not surprising to see Leibniz approving the preface to *The Divine Being*, when he remarks on the book in a letter to Sophie: "I was delighted to see that the preface took up those things that separate theology from philosophy".<sup>14</sup> That Leibniz genuinely agreed that theology and philosophy should go hand in hand is confirmed by his remarks on *Elucidarius cabalisticus*: "The more reason agrees with religion, the better are all things known... Philosophy and theology are two truths agreeing amongst each other."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the intimate connection that is asserted to exist between religious matters and reason, in *The Divine Being*, is cited by Leibniz as proof that van Helmont is not a fanatic who would disregard reason when it suits him. He says of the discussion that it

sufficiently justifies Mr. Van Helmont against those who accuse him of Enthusiasm because Enthusiasts have this in common with Libertines, they both say things against reason.<sup>16</sup>

The idea that the *predicatum inest subiecto* principle could be applied to worldly things was the basis for Leibniz's project of a universal science. If propositions about the world could be analytically reduced into primitive concepts (which at the same time are primitive existents) then it would be possible to compile an encyclopaedia of such primitives. By assigning characters to primitives, as well as to the logical operations by which they could be combined, it would be possible to synthesize

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<sup>14</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 56; L Br 389, f. 9ff.

<sup>15</sup> B, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 56; L Br 389, f. 9ff.



primitives into complex propositions with mathematical rigour and clarity: "With the aid of signs we will easily have the most distinct notions, for we will have at hand a mechanical thread of meditation as it were."<sup>17</sup> An ideal language would represent those simple ideas or beings which depend on, or flow from, God. At the same time, such a language must also have been the Word of God: the language by which his thoughts of the possible creatures and the possible universes might be represented and which, in their actualization, would be a language of creation. When Leibniz abandoned his universal science project in the early 1680s, the concept of the rational order of nature was maintained. The unfolding of complete concepts, the Word of God, his natural language, still existed transcendentally: they still "flowed from one and the same spring, to wit, from the Divine Being". These Platonic and Christian epistemological presuppositions are common both to Leibniz and Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, and are the basis for their agreement that philosophy and theology are not antithetical to each other but are, rather, associates. However, whereas for Leibniz certain knowledge of the actual structure and genesis of the cosmos was not accessible to human minds, Christian Lurianic Kabbalah adopted the highly elaborate kabbalistic account of cosmology.

If Leibniz had sought an exoteric garb for his cosmology, to make it accessible to the mass of people, it certainly was not going to come from his transcendental rationalism. For that he would have to look elsewhere: for an account which utilized graspable imagery and which yet, in its fundamental concepts, did not conflict with those of the Leibnizian system.

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<sup>17</sup> Coudert, "Some Theories of a Natural Language", p. 108; A, 2, I, 413.

## Chapter 5 The Fundamental Nature of the Cosmos

### 5.1 Space, Matter, Time and Motion

I have argued that in Leibniz's metaphysics his theory of substance follows from his rationalism. The subjects of true propositions are formed by a perceiving subject itself out of a spatio-temporal nexus of perceptions. What is called a "material object" is nothing more than a nexus of "sense"-perceptions. This is why Leibniz can say that the objects of dreams do not differ from the objects of wakefulness by an absolute reality which pertains only to the latter but not the former, but only differ with respect to the degree of the ordering of the constituent perceptions. Though this degree tends to be sharply defined in our experience (although we have no way to make a real comparison, except by the memory of the prior other state) it is ultimately a question of the experienced degree of clarity of the nexus of perceptions which provides the seeming reality of an object. The reality of things derived only of the *a posteriori* therefore has no more than moral (probable) certainty for Leibniz: if there is to be an absolute reality, it has to be found through the *a priori*, the abstract.

This I who thinks and is called mind or soul, is incomparably more certain than the existence of sensible things, and thus, that it would not be impossible, speaking with metaphysical rigour, that, at bottom, there should only be these intelligible substances, and that sensible things should only be appearances. However, our lack of attention lets us take sensible things for the only true things. It is also worth observing that, if in dreaming I should discover some demonstrative truth, mathematical or otherwise (as, in fact, can be done), it would be as certain as if I had been awake. This allows us to see the extent to which intelligible truth is independent of the truth or the existence of sensible and material things outside of us.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To Sophie Charlotte, 1702, in AG, p. 189.



I have shown that for Leibniz reality is that whose existence cannot be doubted: is that subject of a proposition which can be shown that it must be as it is and not otherwise by demonstrating that the proposition is reducible to self-evident first principles. However, I have also shown that Leibniz came to reject that such ultimate analysis was humanly possible, since a finite mind cannot embrace the infinite number of eternal truths (true ideas of all particulars, possible and actual) required for demonstrating the truth of any one particular actual proposition. It follows too that this is also a rejection that the ultimate nature of the world could ever be known by human beings. Yet, since Leibniz clings to the principle of sufficient reason and to the existence of an ultimate sufficient reason, as the metaphysical foundation of a rationally ordered world, or God, of whom *all* the eternal truths are ideas or perceptions in his mind; and since he holds that every true idea in that particular set of ideas selected for "actualization" by God's will precisely *is* an absolutely real existent, or substance, Leibniz says that a plurality of substances does exist, as the set of necessary true propositions in the omniscient mind, and which constitutes what is called the world. Consequently, the "ultimate nature of the cosmos" does not refer to a non-existent fantasy but rather to something that is merely unknowable: man cannot know it, but God can and does.

Leibniz defines space as "the order of co-existing phenomena".<sup>2</sup> That is, space is a mode of relating perceptions to each other, specifically by predicates of distance relation, and which are abstract in nature, being but functions of mind. This explains his opposition to the Newtonian concept of space as being not an abstract mental entity of relation, but a real thing in itself, an entity existing independently of the mental, as a sort of objective vessel, within which minds may or may not come to

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<sup>2</sup> To des Bosses, 16 June 1712, in L, p. 604.

inhabit. This means that for Leibniz space only pertains to the perceptions of the individual mind, the individual substance. Space is the abstract and general matrix by which perceptions are arranged into the nexuses which are commonly called objects, and which are separated by relational predicates of distance. In the case of the substance called God, his perceptions or ideas of the world are not only known by him to be true and therefore to exist (to be substances, rather than mere objects of moral certainty), but the mutual relations between these ideas, including their spatial ones, are known to him with certainty. Therefore, within God's mind, there exists a plurality of substances separated by absolute relations of distance, meaning that the general matrix of his ideas (space) is *objective*: or, a world of plural independent substances does exist. The mind which knows that its perceptions are necessarily true, and knows that the spatial predicates between these perceptions are necessarily true, knows that there is a world of plural substances. But such knowledge cannot be attained by human beings, for the perceptions of finite minds can only ever be ordered into nexuses of things with mere moral certainty. Thus are the limits of the human mind. Without the full-demonstration of the certainty of phenomena, neither substances, nor their co-existence, can be known to be true; as can neither the existence of a real plurality of substances, with real spatial relations between them. In short, the existence of the world external to man, is undemonstrable. The spatial matrix of perception for man is eternally limited to the private and subjective.

I consider the explanation of all phenomena solely through the perceptions of monads... In this way of explaining things, space is the order of co-existing phenomena... and there is no spatial or absolute nearness or distance between monads.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



Insofar as, for Leibniz, man cannot prove via *a posteriori* perception that an objective space populated with substances exists, he is in agreement with Berkeley. Berkeley concluded from this that other substances, indeed the very notion of the external world itself, could have no basis in reality. However, Leibniz insists that they and it can and do.

When Leibniz conceded that certain knowledge of the world was impossible for the finite mind, he did not abandon rationalism but restricted it to the transcendental. It is there that his cosmology is located. Cosmological notions, such as body, though not demonstrable as realities by empirical means, are asserted to have an existence in the transcendental realm. In this regard, Leibniz is in agreement with Kant.<sup>4</sup> It is via the proof of the existence of an omniscient mind that the existence of the external world is (indirectly) demonstrated. This answers Russell's criticism that Leibniz's cosmology could not support a plurality of substances because there was no objective spatial matrix of real distance relations.<sup>5</sup> Russell's argument applies *sub specie mentis hominis*; but Leibniz's cosmology is transcendental and founded *sub specie mentis dei*.

If the ultimate nature of the cosmos is founded on the objective spatial matrix of God's ideas, then further investigation must be directed towards this matrix. Now, space is a relationship between substances: it is not a thing itself but an abstract numerical entity. This means that substances are not separated by an actual space, as if by some intervening other reality, but may take any logically possible assignable

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<sup>4</sup> Leibniz and Berkeley are compared in Adams, pp. 224-228. He also believes that "Leibniz's phenomenalism is a forerunner of the phenomenalism of Kant". See *ibid.*, p. 219. Peter Loftson writes that "Kant's 'agnostic realism', for example- his belief that there are things-in-themselves whose natures are wholly opaque to us- seems clearly an intellectual descendant of Leibniz's doctrine of the reality of external substances, together with the windowlessness of soul monads". See Peter Loftson, "Was Leibniz an Idealist?", *Philosophy* 74 (1999), 361-385, (p. 371).

<sup>5</sup> See Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: Routledge, 1992). Chapter X, section 68.

numerical value for their distance predicates. Since the nature of these distance ratios is purely numerical, and since, logically, numerical entities can be divided *ad infinitum*, as well as summed *ad infinitum*, so the assignable distances between substances can proceed towards the infinitely small and the infinitely large. In short, space, like number, is a continuum: it can be sub-divided infinitely, with the consequence that there can be no smallest indivisible elements of space: indeed there can be no ultimate atomic constituents at all; and the notion of real constitution is shown to be an erroneous one. In the "resolution of the ideal" one always proceeds from a whole to the parts, not the other way (from parts to a whole). Thus Leibniz's meditations on the "labyrinth of the continuum" led him to reject the concept of the atom (as indivisible element) as rationally absurd. At the same time the corollary notion of vacua is also rejected. What we are left with, in the spatial matrix of God's mind, are distance relations between substances which, logically, can take smaller and smaller values *ad infinitum*. And in the omniscient mind, which is the matrix of all possible relations, combinations of eternal truths into true propositions must be possible in ever-diminishing relations of distance-separation. Consequently, the plurality of subjects of true propositions, in God's mind, is infinite: or, the ultimate nature of the universe is a (spatial) plenum, an infinity of substances.

In this conception, matter, or that whose essence is spatial extension, can never be *a* substance but only ever *many* substances. For any area or volume of the plenum consists not of a "bit of space", since space is not a thing *a la* Newton; nor does it consist of a plurality of atoms (and vacua), since spatial extension is divisible infinitely, and the atom is impossible. The notion that the division of matter could suddenly end with the indivisible, would be a contradiction of Leibniz's principle of continuity. Furthermore, the notion that the elements of matter could be unextended



(i.e. "mathematical points"), would mean that they could never act as the constituents of matter, since any number of things absolutely without spatial extension will never accumulate into anything with extension. In any case, since true atoms have no parts, they could never vary amongst themselves, and so any compounds formed of them would also be without variety; indeed the universe as a whole would be homogeneous. In addition, since entities without parts would be infinitely hard, interaction between atoms through collision would be impossible.

But if spatial extension cannot be the essence of substance, then the many substances (indeed the infinitely many) that exist within any particular volume of the plenum, must be without extension themselves. Such unextended substances, Leibniz calls monads.<sup>6</sup>

Now the spatial arrangement of perceptions into objects is not the only type of ordering to be met with, for Leibniz declares that a variety, and by implication succession, of perceptions is an indubitable truth of fact.

Not only is it immediately evident to me that *I think*, but it is just as evident that *I think various thoughts*: at one time *I think about A* and at another *about B* and so on. Thus the Cartesian principle is sound, but it is not the only one of its kind.<sup>7</sup>

That perceptions vary or change means the same as to say that perceptions succeed each other. Though I may question my recollection of a now-ceased perception, it is held as indubitable by Leibniz that at least *a* change has occurred, in the same way that though I may question the certainty of a present perception, nevertheless I hold it

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<sup>6</sup> Leibniz's conception of the nature of space and matter, along with its proposed evolution, is discussed in Glenn Hartz and J.A. Cover, "Space and Time in the Leibnizian Metaphysic", *Nous* 22 (1988), 493-519. See also Hartz, "Leibniz's Phenomenalisms", *The Philosophical Review* 101 (July 1992), 511-549.

<sup>7</sup> RB, section 367.

as indubitable that I am at least having *a* perception. Consequently, it is a truth of fact for Leibniz that perceptions do succeed each other, however untrustworthily. And the mode by which perceptions are related to each other is called time:

I consider the explanation of all phenomena solely through the perceptions of monads... In this way of explaining things... time is the order of successive phenomena.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, and like space, time is abstract in nature, being only a function of mental substance, i.e. a mode of ordering perceptions. Whereas spatial ordering predicates separation by relating co-existent phenomena, temporal ordering predicates separation by relating changed phenomena. In other words, what we call a period of time or lapse of time is nothing else than an abstract that exists in a mind, and which relates two perceptual states according to an assignable change between them. What we call motion equates to the change of spatial separation between (temporally) successive phenomena, and so motion too, as nothing more than a function of space and time predicates, is itself an abstract mental entity: "If we consider only what motion contains precisely and formally, that is, change of place, motion is not something entirely real."<sup>9</sup>

The ideas or perceptions in the mind of God, because of his omniscience, are known to be real (i.e. a plurality of monads exists, which are the objects of his perception). His omniscience provides him with true knowledge of the real differences between (co-existent) substances, and which therefore serves to provide certain relations of separation amongst them (an objective spatial matrix). This

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<sup>8</sup> To des Bosses, 16 June 1712, in L, p. 604.

<sup>9</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 18, in AG, p. 51.



omniscience further provides true knowledge of the real changes and rates of change amongst monads, and therefore the certain relations of succession amongst them. The spatio-temporal matrix of ideas in God is therefore objective: this omniscient mind embraces with true certainty all monads and all their changes, and so when he perceives motion, it is real motion. Thus objective space, time and motion exist in the mind of God. However, it should be carefully pointed out that this objectiveness of space and time is not what Leibniz calls absoluteness. By this latter he refers to the (Newtonian) notion of space or time considered as something real and existent in itself, beyond the realm of perceptions, and which acts as an absolute frame that provides absolute positions and boundaries for space, and absolute beginnings and ends for time. What Leibniz is denying when he rejects the absoluteness of space is a correspondence theory of truth; whereas what he asserts in the realm of God's perceptions, is the objectiveness of spatial relations, effectively a coherence theory of truth.

If anyone were to imagine the world to have been created sooner, he would find that it had not been made any sooner, since there is no absolute time, and time is nothing but the order of successive things. In the same way, if anyone were to imagine the whole universe to be moved from its place without changing the mutual distances of things with respect to one another, nothing will have happened, since absolute space is something imaginary, and there is nothing real in it but the distances of bodies. In a word, they are orders, not things.<sup>10</sup>

The minds of human beings and all finite creatures, on the other hand, do not and cannot embrace the whole universe of infinite ideas; consequently what perceptions they have possess only moral certainty. Since they cannot isolate monads in their minds, they cannot spatially resolve things objectively; from which it follows that

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<sup>10</sup> To des Bosses, 29 May 1716, in AG, p. 201.

they cannot temporally resolve things objectively either. Space, time and motion can only ever be subjective and relative for finite minds.

Russell had criticized Leibniz's assertion that a plurality of monads existed, on the grounds that to know a real plurality, presupposes knowledge of a real co-existence of substances, which, *qua* temporal notion, presupposes knowledge of objective time.<sup>11</sup> But, again, his criticism applies *sub specie mentis hominis*, whereas Leibniz's metaphysics is based on God's mind.

Now, time is an abstract numerical relation of change, and so, like space, is an ideal continuum, each and any quantum of change or "period of time" is divisible *ad infinitum*. No matter how many times we narrow down the quanta of change, we will always find intervening quanta: changes within changes, motion within motion, successions of phenomena within successions of phenomena. So there can be no ultimate elements of time, no discrete jumps of change or motion, and correlatively, no stasis or absolute immobility. Conversely, there can be no greatest time period, no ultimate over-arching age to nature: the world can therefore have neither a beginning nor end in time. Neither can there be a greatest rate of change or maximum speed:

There cannot be a most rapid motion or a greatest number. For number is something discrete, where the whole is not prior to its parts, but conversely. There cannot be a most rapid motion, because motion is a modification, and is the transference of a certain thing in a certain time.<sup>12</sup>

In God's mind, everything is in perpetual motion, the plurality of change, succession of phenomena, is infinite, or, the ultimate nature of the cosmos is a temporal, as well as a spatial, plenum. However, it is the case that monads (and these are the existential

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<sup>11</sup> See Russell, chapter IV, section 22.

<sup>12</sup> Pk, section 520.



elements of the plenum) endure through time, for monads are not dependent on other worldly monads, and so can neither be destroyed nor created while the world exists. If, then, time, change and motion are in perpetual flux, then such must refer to some kind of entity constructed *out of* monads, since each monad in itself is not in flux. Indeed it has been seen that, because space is a continuum, any thing of perception is fundamentally a volume of the plenum: that is, it embraces an infinite collection of monads, which, by virtue of the continuity of time, must be a collection in perpetual flux.

### *Comparison*

I have pointed out that according to Leibniz the concept of space is "the order of co-existing phenomena", <sup>13</sup> and that this order is an abstract relation applied by thinking beings to two phenomena perceived as separate. In that this relation is essentially numerical, Leibniz applies the same operations and laws of arithmetic to it. Hence space (i.e. any extended part of it), like number, can be divided and summed, and these without end, entailing that there can be no indivisible smallest elements, and no inaugmentable largest whole. If there are no elements of extended being (atoms) there can be no (spatial) constitution, therefore matter is not what it is commonly conceived to be. True perceptions (as known only to God's mind) are substances; but these are without extension: they are monads, and as unextended entities, exist in an infinite number, or, together, are the spatial plenum. Matter, therefore, as an (extended)

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<sup>13</sup> To des Bosses, 1712, in L, p. 604.

volume of this plenum, is not a single being, but a collection of (an infinity of) monads.

The Christian Lurianic kabbalists also considered space to be a mere mode of substance ("three-fold Dimension or Locality, is onely an Accident and not an Essential Property of Bodies" <sup>14</sup>), and received the same numerical treatment by them as by Leibniz (Thus Conway writes that "there can be no actual division in matter which cannot always be further divided... without end" <sup>15</sup>).

Thus, in rejecting atoms as a logical fallacy, the Christian Lurianic kabbalists conclude that "there is an infinity of creatures, each of which contains an infinity in itself, and so on to infinity". <sup>16</sup> This is the plenum: what van Helmont refers to as the watery body of nature, of which body is but a certain spatial delimitation, and not a single substance "matter", but, rather, is an (infinite) aggregate of spirit (non-material) substances, or monads. Leibniz had noted in his resume of *The Divine Being* that "All Creatures are composed of infinite parts... There are infinite seeds in a single body". <sup>17</sup> In a letter to Sophie he remarks on this that:

Most of all I approve of his opinion about the infinity of things, and I have already said in the *Journal des Savants* that each part having parts to infinity, there is no little portion of matter that does not contain an actual infinity of creatures (and apparently living creatures). <sup>18</sup>

In *Thoughts on Genesis*, to his paraphrasing of van Helmont's comments, Leibniz adds:

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<sup>14</sup> *The Spirit of Diseases*, section 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Principles*, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> OK, ii, 1073.

<sup>18</sup> 3 September 1694, in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 57; L Br, 389, fols 9 ff.



Indeed there is a life in all things; and they shoot very wide of the mark who deem that bodily things are put together of atoms and particles, void of all life.<sup>19</sup>

And in the manuscript of *Thoughts*, not published in the edition, Leibniz added a further remark on this theme:

Concerning this matter, many things are usefully suggested by Henry More, perhaps by the author of the *Cabala Denudata*; also by the author of the *Vulgar Philosophy* refuted, which was published with the meditations of the very clever English Countess, in which more of the same can be read.<sup>20</sup>

The notion that space is an ideal relation between phenomena implies the plenum; but there are further important considerations concerning the truth status of predicates of space, which are crucial for establishing that the universe is a *plurality* of substances. Without real spatial relations between substances there can be no real separation, thus no real plurality of substances. Leibniz, as has been seen, distinguishes between divine and human epistemology. God knows *a priori* both the truth of his ideas about things and the truth of their attributes of spatial relations: thus he knows substances in real relations of separation, and thus their real plurality. Man, on the other hand, has no *a priori* knowledge of such things: his *a posteriori* experience alone cannot rescue him from his solipsism, and the existence of the external world can only be known indirectly via the proof of the existence of God. But the Christian Lurianic kabbalists do not address this deeper issue.

Passing on to the treatment of the concepts of time and motion, the same agreements and omissions of analysis are to be found between Leibniz and the kabbalists as were met with concerning space and matter. Leibniz considers time, like

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<sup>19</sup> p. 60. Compare draft notes at OH, I, 94-96; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 37, where no such explicit rejection of the atom is made by van Helmont.

<sup>20</sup> LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 56.

space, to be an ideal relation. Inasmuch as motion precisely is the change or succession of phenomena, he writes that "motion is not something entirely real", <sup>21</sup> i.e. it is ideal. And because time and motion are essentially numerical quanta, time periods and speeds can be divided or augmented without end, with the consequences that there can be no indivisible or smallest time periods: therefore no jumps across space between fundamental elements of succession; and no indivisible or smallest speeds: no absolute stasis. In this temporal plenum, every time period contains an infinity of smaller time periods, and nature is fundamentally in flux. Conversely, there can be no greatest time period, no ultimate over-arching age to nature: the world can therefore have neither a beginning nor end in time; and there can be no maximum speed.

The same equation of motion to change of states to time is put forward by Conway ("time is nothing but the motion or change of creatures from one condition or state to another " <sup>22</sup>). And she, like Leibniz, derives the same conclusion that time is a continuum.

Now, Leibniz distinguishes between divine and human knowledge. Since human knowledge of the world can only ever be a partial picture, endowed only with the moral certainty of *a posteriori* experience, predicates of change of positions between things is restricted to the merely relative. On the other hand, God's knowing is the *a priori* knowledge of the true spatio-temporal relations between substances, therefore he alone knows true absolute time and motion. But, though the Christian Lurianic kabbalists do not address the issue as to whether or not there can be any true knowledge about these ideals, their analysis of the concepts of space, matter, time and

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<sup>21</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 18, in AG, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Principles*, p. 51.



motion, as ideals, entirely coincides with that of Leibniz.

## 5.2 The Nature and Relationship of Soul and Body

Leibniz's transcendental rationalism extends the *predicatum inest subiecto* principle to existents: a true proposition about the world includes a set of predicates (properties) and a subject, which is a monad, a sufficient reason for why it is as it is. Thus, since any proposition concerning the world is a statement about a volume of the spatio-temporal plenum, the real thing referred to includes both a single monad (as subject and sufficient reason) and a collection of monads (since every thing of the world extends some minimal amount across the plenum). These real things constructed out of the plenum of monads are called corporeal substances by Leibniz. In general, *simple substances* or monads are the (rational) elements of the plenum and which exist everywhere. From out of these, two types of collections occur.

1) Collections of the elemental monads bound together by virtue of a particular single monad, which acts as a uniting principle for the many: the composite or corporeal substances. 2) Collections of simple substances, or even of composite corporeal substances, which, despite embracing real monads themselves, do not have a common unifying principle, so therefore are not substantial wholes: they are not real corporeal substances, but mere aggregates. For example, a heap of stones is only an aggregate of simple substances or monads, and an army or a flock of sheep is only an aggregate of composite or corporeal substances.

What in the corporeal substance is the collection of monads, is what we commonly call "body"; and what is the single unifying monad is what we call "mind" or "soul".

Substances are either simple or composite. Simple substances or monads are either intelligent or without reason... Composite substances are those which constitute a *per se* unity, composed of a soul and an organic body, which is a machine of nature resulting from monads.<sup>23</sup>

The body is the aspect of a thing referred to by a proposition that extends across the plenum and thus is a collection of monads. But, referral to a real thing requires a single monad as subject of the predicates of the proposition, as substance of the body's properties. That is, the material chunk of the universe referred to, with its various properties, must have a soul or mind in order to make the composite real, or to make the corporeal substance. The *predicatum inest subiecto* principle demands that the mode of a real thing or corporeal substance, which is its bodily collection of properties, belongs to, inheres in, is united to, a substance, which is its mind or soul. In this sense, it is the soul of the corporeal substance which gives it its reality:

It also seems that what constitutes the essence of a being by aggregation is only a mode of the things of which it is composed. For example, what constitutes the essence of an army is only a mode of the men who compose it. This mode therefore presupposes a substance whose essence is not a mode of a substance... To put it briefly, I hold this identical proposition, differentiated only by the emphasis, to be an axiom, namely, *that what is not truly one being is not truly one being either*. It has always been thought that one and being are reciprocal things.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Notes for Leibniz to des Bosses, 5 February 1712, in AG, p. 200. See also *Principles of Nature and Grace*, section 1, in AG, p. 207: "A *simple substance* is that which has no parts. A *composite substance* is a collection of simple substances, or *monads*. *Monas* is a Greek word signifying unity, or what is one. Composites or bodies are multitudes; and simple substances --lives, souls and minds-- are unities."

<sup>24</sup> To Arnauld, 30 April 1687, in AG, p. 86.

It can now be seen that in the difference between the mind as a *single* monad and the body as a *multiplicity* of monads lies the common ontological schism between the corporeal body and the incorporeal mind. The mind or soul is thus not composed of other souls; it is the body, rather, that is a collection of (inferior) souls.

Although a soul can have a body made up of parts animated by other souls, the soul or form of the whole is not, as a consequence, composed of the souls or forms of its parts.<sup>25</sup>

Rather, the soul stands in relation to its body as the unitary principle:

Each distinct simple substance or monad, which makes up the centre of a composite substance (an animal, for example) and is the principle of its unity, is surrounded by a *mass* composed of an infinity of other monads, which constitute the *body belonging to* this central monad, through whose properties the monad represents the things outside it, similarly to the way a centre does.<sup>26</sup>

Monads depend on having some properties. In the same way as the notion of the subject of a proposition depends on the notion of predicates, so the monad, the single unitive substantial principle, is understood as that to which the predicates belong, or inhere in. Indeed, monads without any properties would be indistinguishable from each other: this is Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles: "Monads must have some qualities, otherwise they would not even be beings."<sup>27</sup> And as every thing of the world extends at least some way across the plenum, so every monad in a corporeal substance must have at least some properties, which considered *in toto* is precisely what we conceive of as the spatially extended, or the body. A mind always has a body, and even when there appears not to be one, on account of size or

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, in AG, p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> *Principles of Nature and Grace*, section 3, in AG, p. 207.

<sup>27</sup> *Monadology*, section 8, in AG, p. 214.



aethereality, the very notion of mind, in respect of the beings of this world, of this *plenum*, demands an associated body. Thus "every finite soul is embodied, even the angels are not excepted".<sup>28</sup>

Now, the plenum is continuous in time as well as in space; and so the body aspect of a corporeal substance is a collection of monads in constant motion: the spatial and temporal predicates are continuously changing. This is not problematic since the body aspect considered alone is a mere aggregate and not a monad (an enduring substance). On the other hand, the mind aspect *is* a monad (a single monad, not a collection) and therefore it must have all those essential properties characteristic of substance. It has been seen that uniqueness (expressed as the principle of the identity of indiscernibles) must be an essential attribute of a monad, as must its characteristic of being the spatial unity of the body it is associated with. A further characteristic essential to substance is that of autonomy or non-involvement in change: monads cannot be affected by other substances. Therefore, the mind of a corporeal substance is a temporal as well as a spatial unity: it endures through the changing of its (bodily) properties, while retaining its own identity through time.

We must not imagine, as some who have misunderstood my thought do, that each soul has a mass or portion of matter of its own, always proper to or allotted by it, and that it consequently possesses other lower living beings, forever destined to serve it. For all bodies are in a perpetual flux, like rivers, and parts enter into them and depart from them continually.<sup>29</sup>

Even in cases where a body manifestly ceases to be associated with a soul because it ceases to display any mode of action from which a soul, as uniting principle, can be inferred, in short, what we call death, it follows that since souls endure as long as the

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<sup>28</sup> Wn, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Monadology*, section 71, in AG, p. 222.

universe does, the soul of the now dead body must still exist in the corpse, and moreover, since souls are always accompanied with at least *some* bodily counterpart, there must still exist a living body around the extant soul. At death, the spatial extent of the soul's body rapidly shrinks away, but, no matter that this new-sized body cannot be seen: its existence follows from the doctrine of corporeal substance and the indestructibility of monads.

There is only one reasonable view to take-- namely, the conservation not only of the soul, but also of the animal itself and its organic machine, even though the destruction of its larger parts reduces it to a smallness which escapes our senses.<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, metempsychosis is impossible, for this precisely means the complete detachment of soul from body while it passes from the one to the next.

There is often metamorphosis in animals, but there is never metempsychosis nor transmigration of souls; there are also no completely *separated souls*, nor spirits without bodies.<sup>31</sup>

Now, souls co-exist with the universe and so, as well as extending beyond death, they also extend before birth. That is to say, they did not come into existence at the moment of conception, or at the detectable animation of a bodily portion of matter, but rather had pre-existed from all time.

Every mind is of endless duration. Every mind is indissolubly implanted in matter; this matter is of a certain magnitude... There are innumerable minds everywhere; there are minds in the ovum even before conception, nor do they perish, even if conception never follows.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *New System*, in AG, p. 141.

<sup>31</sup> *Monadology*, section 72, in AG, p. 222.

<sup>32</sup> PK, sections 476-77.

The soul of the corporeal substance, as a single monad, has, of course, no spatial extension: it is "incorporeal", consequently not a thing to be discovered by the senses. Its associated body is the multiplicity of monads, or is the extension of corporeal substance in space. But this space is a continuum, and so the body of a mind could continue shrinking indefinitely, with the consequence that there can be no absolute limiting smallest size to which the body of the soul might retract to, for example, after "death". Thus "we do not need to imagine, with the Jews, that there is a little bone of insurmountable hardness in which the soul takes refuge." <sup>33</sup>

That every monad has a bodily collection of monads implies something very important about the nature of the cosmos. Since the monads which are embraced by the body of a corporeal substance, each and individually, also embrace *by definition* their own collection of monads, for which they are the spatio-temporal uniting principles, so they make up smaller corporeal substances in their own right.

Thus we see that each living body has a dominant entelechy, which in the animal is the soul; but the limbs of this living body are full of other living beings, plants, animals, each of which also has its entelechy, or its dominant soul. <sup>34</sup>

And since each of these embraces yet further collections of monads, it becomes clear that, because of the infinite divisibility of the plenum, this dissectioning of nature proceeds without end: "There is an infinite number of creatures in the smallest particle of matter, because of the actual division of the *continuum* to infinity." <sup>35</sup>

Hence, there can be no ultimate monads which could serve as the elemental building blocks of nature. And if these do not exist, then corporeal substances, really

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<sup>33</sup> To Arnould, 30 April 1687, in AG, p. 88.

<sup>34</sup> *Monadology*, section 70, in AG, p. 222.

<sup>35</sup> H, section 195.



united beings, cannot be *constituted* by the multiplicity of monads which is their "corporeal" aspect: rather, their status as real beings is supplied by something "incorporeal": by a single principle which is without parts.

The ultimate nature of the cosmos is the co-existent plurality of monads, or the totality of all the subjects of true propositions, which exists only in the mind of God because only his omniscient mind sees all things in all their true relations. In short, all God's perceptions or ideas are true propositions; and, since a true proposition precisely equates to a corporeal substance in idealistic rationalism, so the endless dissecting of corporeal substances into further ones, applies equally to the ideas, perceptions or true propositions in God's mind. The idea of a true proposition in his mind includes a single idea to which a multiplicity of ideas may be associated by virtue of the "geometrical method" that all predicates are contained in the subject. As each of these predicate ideas (or properties of the body of a corporeal substance) are true ideas in God's mind, they too can be treated as individual true propositions in themselves, or as single subject ideas, each of which spawns, by the geometrical method, a further sub-grouping of predicate ideas; and this process, because of the infinite divisibility of space and time, has no end. Real beings, unities, corporeal substances, true propositions, are seen, therefore, to emerge not from "below", not by *constitution* or the coming together of the underlying many to form the one, but rather from "above": by *dissemination*, or the distribution of an over-arching oneness into the many, which process, as has been seen, continues *ad infinitum*.

When Leibniz refers to matter he means the bodily aggregation (of simple or composite substances) considered *alone* (apart from the soul). The ultimate nature of matter concerns its status as aggregate, as multiplicity. Since this, by definition, is not a unity, a singularity, it is not a real substance. Though, as *collections*, they cannot be

substances, that they are, however, collections *of substances*, leads Leibniz to deny that matter is a nothing: rather, he calls it "well-founded". Collections without substantial unity, such as collections of simple substances (e.g. a heap of stones), or of composite substances (e.g. an army), or even of substances *with* a substantial unity (i.e. the corporeal substance) when considered *alone* from its uniting soul, is well-founded matter. But it remains that particular and actual being is only to be found in the imposition of unity on the many, of the simple substance on the aggregate: the partnership of soul and body, such as is corporeal substance.

I am also far from saying that matter is a *shadow* and even a *nothing*. These expressions go too far. Matter is an aggregate, *not a substance but a substantiatum* as would be an army or a flock; and, insofar as it is considered as making up *one* thing, it is a phenomenon, very real, in fact, but a thing whose *unity* is constructed by our conception.<sup>36</sup>

In view of this, should Leibniz be classified as an idealist? If i) idealism is defined as the belief that no thing can be wholly independent of mind, then most philosophers would be idealists. If ii) the term is restricted to the belief that there are only minds, then Berkeley would be an idealist, but Leibniz would not, for, as I will set out, the Leibnizian system necessitates that every mind has its associated body. This is the concept of the corporeal substance, and these exist everywhere throughout the plenum. Body, as a notion distinct from mind, is essential to Leibniz's cosmology.

If iii) idealism is the belief that there is no other *substance* than mind, specifically that there is nothing called matter that exists independently of mind, then Leibniz *is* an idealist. Because no body can be conceived to exist anywhere in the Leibnizian

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<sup>36</sup> To Samuel Masson, 1716, in AG, p. 227. See also Letter to Remond, 11 February, 1715, in L, p. 659: "Matter itself is nothing but a phenomenon --though well-founded-- which results from the monads." This issue is discussed at some length in Pauline Phemister, "Leibniz and the Elements of Compound Bodies", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7 (1) (1999), 57-78.

universe without a mind, and that "body", in any case, is itself (a collection) of minds. there is no concept of anything existing independently of mind. Body is as indispensable to Leibniz's cosmology as is mind; but on no account is it to be conceived as a substance separate to and independent from mind. It is with this definition that Leibniz could be called an idealist.

What, then, is the fundamental nature of the relationship between monads, i.e. between a single monad (mind of a corporeal substance) and a plurality of other monads (the body of a corporeal substance as the aggregate associated with its mind)? It is known that a corporeal substance is a single substance with a set of properties, which is in fact a true proposition that exists in God's mind: a true proposition that includes the idea of a single subject (as spatio-temporal unity) and a set of ideas called predicates (which are "extended in space" and in temporal flux). These two strata of idea, the subject and the predicate, are related according to the order of logical dependence that exists between them, which order, in the omniscient mind, is absolute. The idea of the subject is logically anterior to, is the sufficient reason for, the predicate ideas. That the subject contains the predicates translates, in worldly terms, to the substance containing the properties. And this rational ordering, this notion of containment, makes the changing of predicates something to be explained in terms of their dependence on their mutual subject, which is now conceived as the agent. Thus the relationship is a causal one. But how does the subject *cause* its predicates? Or the substance *cause* its properties? Not by efficient cause, in the philosophy of Leibniz. The non-elasticity of physical atoms makes change through impact impossible; but the concept of the atom has always been rejected on rational grounds. Occult efficient cause, or action at a distance, is also rejected: such is contrary to what the very meaning of "efficient cause" is; and to allow a definition of



this kind, would result in any relation between two things to be a possible cause. In fact, as I have indicated, the conception of substance, as that which is essentially independent and autonomous, permits of no real influence at all from another being, or from what is external to it. Rather, the cause of predicates and their perpetual changings, have to be located in the substance itself to which they belong. "It follows from what we have just said that the monad's natural changes come from an *internal principle*, since no external cause can influence it internally." <sup>37</sup>

Now, any particular concept in the mind of God can have the predicates attributable to it at any instant deduced purely from the thorough understanding of it. Only God can do this because only his mind knows all the relations that exist between all the infinite ideas. So not only can he have knowledge of all the true predicates that a subject has at any moment, but he knows all its future states too, since he can deduce how each state, or set of predicates, logically entails the next. And since he sees all ideas and has an infallibly rational mind, so the sequence of predicates develops ineluctably from the initial conception. It is this certain entailment that is called the flowing of predicates from the subject. Since what is true in God's mind precisely is the ultimate nature of the cosmos, it can be seen that the flowing of ideas of predicates from ideas of subjects in the divine mind, equates to the flowing of properties from substances: "*The present is big with the future*, and that he who sees all sees in that which is that which shall be." <sup>38</sup> The flowing of properties out of substances, or conversely, substances as the causal source of properties, can now be seen to be a reversal of the process of analytical reduction of concepts employed in the Leibnizian method of rational explanation. Insofar as universal analysis seeks to

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<sup>37</sup> *Monadology*, section 11, in AG, p. 214.

<sup>38</sup> H, section 360.

reduce all propositions about states of the world to ultimate sufficient reasons, or primitive substances, the temporal development of the world, in terms of properties flowing out of substances, is a reversal of this process, a sort of "top-down" metaphysics. Importantly for cosmology, this process is referred to by Leibniz as *emanation*: "A mode...since it does not subsist through itself, will always emanate out of a substance."<sup>39</sup> In the sense that the subject or substance is the cause of, is logically anterior to, the predicates or properties, the effects, or what are logically posterior, so the subject or substance is called the active principle, and the predicates or properties, the passive principle. In emanation, the active is the emanator, the passive is the emanated.

Since substance endures throughout the unceasing changing of its properties, the active principle must correspondingly be distinguished from the passive as being permanent to the passive's successiveness. Leibniz finds this expressed in the difference between force and motion. Because motion is nothing but a function of the changing predicates of space with respect to time, at an instant, when the time period is zero, motion itself is zero: it ceases to be at that moment, thus is not an enduring thing. In contradistinction, the notion of force is conceived to still exist at an instant, since otherwise, if it too vanished there would be nothing to move things on to the next state. In other words, the cause of change is not motion: this is just another word for change. Rather, the cause of change is something which endures: what we call force.

If there is nothing in motion but this relative change, it follows that there is no reason in nature for ascribing motion to one thing rather than another. The consequence of which will be, that there is no real motion. Thus in order to say that anything moves, we require not only that it should change its situation

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<sup>39</sup> To des Bosses, 1 September 1706, in GP, ii, 313.

relatively to other things, but also that it should contain the cause of change, the force or action.<sup>40</sup>

Substance is an enduring active force, a "first entelechy", "primitive force", "original activity", "appetition"; and since it does not cease to exist when it manifests no action, it is also the notion of unrealized force: it is "effort", "potency", "urge of acting".<sup>41</sup> Active principles are called substances when applied to the world, and concepts when applied to the mind of God. Thus it is seen that the force of a substance is the *force of reason* in the order of ideas in God's mind. And as the rational implication, or force, of an idea does not cease merely because the ideas it implies have not been thought through, so the force of a substance does not cease because its properties have not been manifested.

One creature is more perfect than another insofar as one finds in it that which provides an *a priori* reason for what happens in the other; and this is why we say that it acts on the other."<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, when any true concept, as active principle, has the ideas logically implied by it thought out, this active principle remains *unchanged*: it continues to possess the same force of reason as before; none of its original meaning has been altered by the development of the ideas that logically flow from it; indeed, the source concept, as logical foundation of the subsequent chain of ideas, must endure in its exact original way in order to rationally sustain those ideas dependent on it. This

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<sup>40</sup> *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*, undated, in GP, iv, 369.

See also *On Nature Itself*, section 9, in AG, p. 160: "For there can be no action without a force for acting, and, conversely, a power which can never be exercised is empty... Action and power are different things, the former successive, the latter persisting... Not only is it the case that everything that acts is an individual substance, but also that every individual substance acts without interruption."

<sup>41</sup> See *New System*, in AG, p. 139; *On Nature Itself*, section 12, in AG, pp. 162-63; H, section 87.

<sup>42</sup> *Monadology*, section 50, in AG, p. 219.



notion of an emerging series of ideas from one original generating concept is Leibniz's analogy with calculus. Likewise when the active principle is conceived as worldly substance, as source of the properties which flow from it, it must remain unchanged. That the active principle remains unaltered whilst the passive (constantly) develops out of it, is the reason why Leibniz found emanation a suitable term; for in that doctrine the emanator is an enduring unchanging active principle to the emanated transitory and flux passive principle. But before Leibniz had fully worked out his doctrine as I have set it forth, he could not see how change could be effected by emanation, because causal relations, he thought, surely involved a change in the active principle. At this time he did not conceive cause in terms of the order of reasons amongst a pre-established harmony of substances, but rather still, in some way, along the lines of cause by real influence. Thus in the *Foreword to a Universal Characteristic* of 1672 (?) he writes: "(Cause through emanation) is efficient cause without change of itself." And in the margin: "Therefore cause is not by emanation." <sup>43</sup>

In notes he made to a letter from Arnold Eckhard in 1677, he is

not sure whether, properly speaking, [emanation] is action where qualities flow out of form, or properties out of essence, for everything which we commonly call action involves at least a change in the enduring thing. <sup>44</sup>

But to Henri Basnage de Beauval in 1696 it seems conceivable that action (of a substance on another) can be by emanation:

I do not at all deny the action of a substance on another. But I believe that the effort which it makes is only in itself, and that the change which happens in the other, only happens itself as a consequence of the pre-established

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<sup>43</sup> A, 6, ii, 490.

<sup>44</sup> May 1677, in Gr, i, 239-40.

harmony. And it is impossible to explain otherwise the action emanating in the natural order of things.<sup>45</sup>

### *Comparison*

In the Leibnizian metaphysics, the substances or fundamental existential elements of the universe lack spatial extension: they are not atoms but monads: they are the worldly substantial equivalents of the subjects of the true propositions in God's mind. As such, they must endure as long as the whole universe does, for substances are independent of other substances, and can only be altered or annihilated by the ultimate substance on which they depend, i.e. God. These eternal monads, because they are unextended and exist in an infinite number, constitute a spatial plenum, out of which the things of the world are formed. Every thing has some spatial extension or body, which embraces an infinity of monads of the plenum, and which collection of monads must be in constant flux, on account of the temporal continuum. When such a collection of monads, or simple substances, has a unifying or ruling principle, Leibniz calls it a corporeal substance (or composite substance). Such is a living organic creature: the unifying principle is its soul, which is a single monad (subject of a true proposition); and the collected monads are its body. Whereas the body is a collection of monads in flux, the soul, as a single substance, is not, but endures the changes of its body.

The same analysis of creatures into soul and body, grounded in a plenum of monads, exists in Christian Lurianic kabbalism. Matter, or that bodily spatially-extended aspect of a creature, "is made by a Coalition or Clinging together of...

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<sup>45</sup> January 1696, in GP, iii, 122.

*Monades* or single Beings", <sup>46</sup> and is not a static collection ("the unity of the greater number of ministering spirits [the monads of the body]... may be dissolved"). <sup>47</sup> A living creature is not any kind of collection of monads, but specifically one in which the monad spirits are united in, and ruled by, one principal spirit. Conway writes that "the spirit of man or brute is also a countless multitude of spirits united in [a] body... such that one is the principal ruler". <sup>48</sup> Thus, the soul and body of a creature do not differ ontologically --they are both based on monads-- rather, they differ by the numerical abstraction of the one (of the soul) and the many (of the body), and the (modal) relationship that holds between them: "the distinction between spirit and body is only modal and incremental, not essential and substantial", <sup>49</sup> and "*the soul must consist of the same principles, whence the body takes its original*". <sup>50</sup>

As a single substance the soul is consequently indestructible (except by God, if he were to annihilate the whole universe). In *The Divine Being* it says "the soul, with respect to her essence, is unchangeable and immortal, so *neither can she be annihilated*". <sup>51</sup> Remarking on this, Leibniz says: "I also agree that all substances always remain and do not perish, which I hold true not only in regard to human souls but also in regard to those of other animals". <sup>52</sup>

Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles necessitates that a substance, in order to be discernible and thereby individuated, must have attributes. In the same way, the soul of a creature, as its substance, must have a body or set of attributes that (spatially) surrounds it. Moreover, this soul is the ruling principle which is

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<sup>46</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> *Principles*, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> *The Divine Being*, section 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, section 85.

<sup>52</sup> To Sophie, 3 September 1694, in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 56; L Br, 389, fols 9ff.



indispensible for the organic creature. The Christian Lurianic kabbalists also define the soul and body of living creatures in terms of each other. In his remarks on *The Divine Being*, Leibniz adds that "the [soul of an] animal is... always united to an organic body".<sup>53</sup>

That souls are immortal and are always accompanied with a body implies some important things according to Leibniz. There can be no *true* metempsychosis: The notion that a soul can pass from one body of its own to another new one of its own, necessitates that for at least an instant of its transition, the soul exists absolutely devoid of, separate from, any body at all. Since the concept of the soul is inextricably defined in terms of the body, such a detachment is prohibited, and therefore the strict definition of re-incarnation must be rejected: "There is never metempsychosis nor transmigration of souls; there are also no completely *separated souls*".<sup>54</sup> The death of a creature cannot involve the cessation of the soul (since it is immortal), but neither can it involve the separation of the soul from the body. Death, rather, is conceived by Leibniz to be a sudden shrinking away of the "organic machine", or the extended aspect of the creature over which it rules, and which is reduced "to a smallness which escapes our senses".<sup>55</sup>

I have shown that the same conclusions about metempsychosis, death and birth were arrived at by the kabbalists, since they held the same tenets concerning the soul: that it is immortal and never without a body. Hence, "when common people perceive no motion in bodies, they call them from ignorance dead bodies without spirit and life".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> *Monadology*, section 72, in AG, p. 222.

<sup>55</sup> *New System*, in AG, p. 141.

<sup>56</sup> *Principles*, p. 51.

If it is ignorant to imagine that a body can cease to have any life in it at all, and thereby to conclude that its soul has entirely departed from it, then it is also ignorant to imagine, conversely, that, at birth, a soul, at once, either arrives from outside, or pops into existence immediately in, the body it will occupy. Rather, as *The Divine Being* explains: "Souls are... brought forth to outward manifestation in distinct bodies and times".<sup>57</sup> The soul of a creature is an eternal soul, which has always had some minimum body, and which at "birth" or at its first signs of life, has merely developed its body, such that its mass and motion is now, for the first time, detectable to an outside observer. Leibniz, in his remarks on *The Divine Being*, having agreed that souls never perish, proceeds to add his own thoughts, which agree with those of the doctrine of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, that souls expand and contract, or develop a body and are enveloped by one through time, and which is responsible for the phenomena of birth and death:

It is not that I believe in the transmigration of souls; but I believe in the transformation of the same animal [the same soul with a body], which is at one time large and at another small and assumes diverse forms, as we see in the case of silkworms when they become butterflies. This conforms more to the order of things than transmigration. There is then the likelihood that there is strictly neither generation nor death but that the animal is only enveloped or developed, remaining always united to an organic body, although this body can become incomparably more subtle than the objects of our senses.<sup>58</sup>

The doctrine of the revolution of souls, which is central to the kabbalists conception of the evolution of the universe of creatures, cannot therefore be interpreted in terms of strict metempsychosis, but rather in terms of metamorphosis, in which bodies that are severally inhabited during a soul's revolutions, are but those massive or gross corporeal developments visible to the senses. At "death" the domain ruled over by the

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<sup>57</sup> Section 88.

<sup>58</sup> L Br, 389, fols 9 ff.

soul contracts rapidly: its true body shrinks away to an indiscernible size, leaving behind the old domain, the gross body (which persists until broken down by "external" forces). The indiscernible or subtle body is now free to pass out from its old kingdom, and at some future time expand again, extending its rulership until it manifests or is "born", is re-incarnated, in another visible gross body.

In the *Seder Olam*, in the discussion of the origin of the world of *Assiyah*, we are told that:

It evidently appears, that human souls did pre-exist before they came into these gross and Earthly Bodies... therefore the Soul had not its original or first existence in this visible World.<sup>59</sup>

Leibniz's remarks on this book discuss the relationship of the soul to gross and subtle bodies, and the relationship between the latter. Whereas souls intimately penetrate all bodies, whether gross or subtle (for souls are metaphysical principles of unity and rulership), bodies do not penetrate each other in this way. Rather, they enter or exit each other in a purely spatial way, as, for example, when an opening in the larger is great enough for the smaller to pass in or out of it:

It is true that subtle bodies pass through gross ones, but they only penetrate through pores, while both subtle and gross bodies are equally penetrated by the souls and entelechies that are intimately connected to them.<sup>60</sup>

In section 28 of the *Seder Olam*, van Helmont states the inextricability of soul from body: "Spirit and Body are not contrary Essences... for every created Spirit is corporeal". Leibniz, in his remarks on this paragraph, agrees, and further adds the distinction of the *gross* body, from which the soul *can* be separated: "Souls will never

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<sup>59</sup> Section 46.

<sup>60</sup> FoL, p. 54.



be separated from all body, only gross bodies. If this is the opinion of the author [van Helmont], it is in no way blameworthy." <sup>61</sup> This *is* the opinion of van Helmont. His revolution of souls is not by the strict metempsychosis of the separation of the soul from *all* body but only from the gross body.

It is therefore clear that, since Leibniz's conceptions of birth as that of the soul with its subtle body developing a gross one, and death as the contraction of the soul with its subtle body within the gross one, a revolution of souls in the way envisioned by the kabbalists, is also possible in terms of the Leibnizian analysis.

The general relationship between the soul and the body in the Leibnizian corporeal substance is that of the soul as a spatio-temporal unity to that of the body as that which is extended (spatially) and in flux (temporally): it is that of the single substance to which a set of properties inheres. In Leibniz's transcendental rationalism, this soul substance is the subject of a true proposition in God's mind: it is what is logically anterior to its predicates in the rational order of nature. And as the subject contains its predicates, so the soul substance is said to be the agent of its properties. This notion of causation, I have argued, seems to be what Leibniz has in mind when he speaks of "emanation". One should therefore interpret all his expressions of the force and activity of the soul, such as "first entelechy", "primitive force", "appetition", "potency", "urge", according to this emanation of properties in this (transcendental and rational) ordering of things.

I have also argued that this same conception of causation is asserted by the Christian Lurianic kabbalists. It is not the "external" or mechanical motion of efficient cause, but an "internal" or vital motion, and which "proceeds from its inner

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<sup>61</sup> FoL, p. 50.

being".<sup>62</sup> This metaphysical power of the soul is "intimately present" in its associated body; and its "emanative" (i.e. non-mechanical, idealistic-rational) nature is likened by the kabbalists to light or heat. In *Thoughts on Genesis*, Leibniz collects a number of natural terms which van Helmont ascribes at different times to the soul and body. Discussing van Helmont's kabbalistic deconstruction of "*Schamajim*", the Hebrew word for Heaven, he writes:

The Hebrew word is compounded of two words, signifying "fire and water", that is, of *Esch*, "fire", and *Majim*, "water", which intimates thus much to us that the power of activity and passiveness, of heat and cold, of male and female, of soul and body, are contained in the heavens.<sup>63</sup>

It is clear that van Helmont's natural terms are drawn from alchemy, but the extent to which any particular one should be regarded as purely allegorical, or having also a basis in nature, is at times confused. Whereas light and dark, heat and cold, may reasonably be regarded as both symbolic of, and as actual state of, the active soul and passive body, and likewise for the Sun as supreme agent of light and heat, the suggestion that the Moon is the corresponding agent which positively cools, does not have a basis in nature. Indeed, referring to the assertion in *The Divine Being* that "fire warms, and the water cools",<sup>64</sup> where van Helmont has taken two symbols for the passive principle (water, coolness) and made one the agent for the other, Leibniz remarks: "I doubt [this] about water".<sup>65</sup>

There are many occasions throughout the Helmontian corpus where fire and water are referred to the soul and body. Leibniz, despite his awareness of van Helmont's occasional confounding of the symbolic and the natural, rightly remarks:

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<sup>62</sup> *Principles*, p. 69.

<sup>63</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> Section 104.

<sup>65</sup> OK, ii, 1070.

When he [van Helmont] composes everything of fire and water and takes these for spiritual principles, I believe that he understands these allegorically, and that he wished to signify by this an active and a passive principle.<sup>66</sup>

Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists shared the same analysis of what soul and body fundamentally are, and that their relationship should be understood in terms of emanative causation.<sup>67</sup> I have already suggested that Leibniz's cosmology is based on Neo-Platonic principles; and I have mentioned a number of possible sources for these as put forward by different scholars. Naturally, these same sources are also where we should look for influences on Leibniz's thought with specific regard to the doctrine of emanation. Christia Mercer points out the emanationism in the writings of Leibniz's teachers, Adam Scherzer and Jakob Thomasius; and she identifies the presence of the doctrine in texts written by Leibniz in the years 1668-1671.<sup>68</sup> Daniel Fouke argues that Aquinas was a possible source, whom Leibniz knew as early as 1670. He notes that although emanation was all pervasive in the seventeenth century, Aquinas's form of the doctrine had already been Christianized: in particular, that the *necessity* of the emanative creation of the world had been obviated.<sup>69</sup>

The emanationism of Kabbalah also made its way into the Christianized Lurianic version. Allison Coudert has argued that the emanationism that Leibniz met with in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, in van Helmont in particular, decisively influenced Leibniz's conception of creation and the nature of matter, and that this took place in

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<sup>66</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 57; L Br, 389, fols 9 ff.

<sup>67</sup> Christia Mercer offers one of the most thorough discussions of emanationism in Leibniz, in chapter six of her *Leibniz's Metaphysics*. See also Fouke. Robert Adams notes that "there is ample evidence that, in traditional theological terms, Leibniz saw God as 'immanent' as well as 'transcendent' in relation to the world... The *Discourse on Metaphysics* suggests a substantial connection between God and finite things, describing creation as a kind of emanation... A similar account is given in the *Monadology*, although 'fulguration' replaces 'emanation'". See Adams, pp. 131-132.

<sup>68</sup> Mercer, pp. 200-202, 208-216.

<sup>69</sup> Fouke, pp. 177-179, 182.



the 1690s.<sup>70</sup> I have already stated my objections to this thesis. It is my contention, rather, that Leibniz was interested in the Helmontian doctrine for its exoteric parallels to his own rational metaphysical one. The alchemico-kabbalistical imagery used by van Helmont to describe the emanative relationship between soul and body can be regarded as a symbolic parallel to what Leibniz has to say on this issue, since, as I have shown, their analysis of the nature and relationship of soul and body is the same.

In chapter 3.3, I proposed that van Helmont in *Thoughts on Genesis* was engaged in a mode of religious harmonizing that involved treating Scripture as symbolic and showing its parallels in rational philosophy. As I have recorded above, Leibniz himself suggests that "when [van Helmont] composes everything of fire and water" he means this "allegorically". These terms are used "to signify... an active and a passive principle", which define the fundamental relationship of soul and body in emanative causation.

### 5.3 On the Transformation of the Same Animal

I have argued that since both Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists assert that every created soul inextricably has a body, an absolutely separate soul is impossible, as is, by implication, strict metempsychosis. That souls are indestructible, but their bodies are mutable collections of monads, is what is meant by the "transformation of the same animal". An immortal soul, inextricable from body, implies that death is neither an absolute cessation or extinction of the soul, nor is it a departure of the soul from the "dead" body, as in metempsychosis, but rather is a transformation: a spatial

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<sup>70</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 84-89.

and vital diminution of the bodily organic machine, which the soul rules. Conversely, birth is not an absolute commencement or creation of the soul, nor an arrival of the soul into the "born" body as in metempsychosis, but rather is a transformation: a spatial and vital augmentation of the organic machine. Thus transformation explains birth and death without recourse to the absolute separation of souls from bodies. Since, for Leibniz, nature is a plenum, it seems to me that a soul (with its invisible body) before its visible birth, or after its death, must be a member of a larger collection of souls, be contained in some larger body, for example, in the mother's body before birth, or in the corpse after death. But since it is only a matter of time before the corpse decomposes, eventually the soul will find itself outside its old gross body, if it has not already passed out of it, and inside some other new body. It is clear then that Leibniz's doctrine of transformation implies that the migration of souls from gross body to gross body is at the very least a possibility and, indeed, an inevitability, despite there being no explicit assertion of this by him in his writings.

This doctrine of transformation was not developed in Leibniz's mind as a result of his kabbalistic interests. I have already argued that it follows from his most fundamental ideas on nature; and writings prior to the 1690s show the doctrine already firmly established. As early as 1671 Leibniz mentions the idea of the subtle body:

This seminal principle is so subtle, that it remains even in the ashes of the substance when consumed by fire, and has the power, as it were, of collecting itself in an invisible centre.<sup>71</sup>

In 1675 he wrote that "there are minds in the ovum even before conception."<sup>72</sup> To

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<sup>71</sup> A, 2, I, 118f.

<sup>72</sup> Pk, section 477.

Arnauld in 1687 he writes that:

since generation is apparently only a change consisting in growth, so death will only be a change consisting in diminution, which causes this animal to reenter the recesses of a world of minute creatures where perceptions are more limited, until the order comes, perhaps calling them to return to the stage. The ancients were mistaken in introducing the transmigration of souls instead of the transformations of the same animal.<sup>73</sup>

The notion that a soul (with its minute body) might at some future time grow again and commandeer a new visible and gross body, is already hinted at here with the phrase "return to the stage". And the same is put more strongly, with an example, in the *New System* of 1695:

No one can specify the true time of death, which for a long time may pass for a simple suspension of noticeable actions, and is basically never anything else in simple animals --witness the *resuscitations* of drowned flies.<sup>74</sup>

In 1699 to John Bernoulli, resuscitation, or visible re-incarnation, is stated to be a possibility, but no more:

In this theatre it is possible for the same animal to be produced more than once, yet I believe that the contrary is also possible. Reason does not determine this question easily, therefore, and I hold it for a deeper investigation.<sup>75</sup>

Yet three years later in *Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit*

Leibniz writes that "the order of nature *requires* that everything be developed again sometime and return to a noticeable state".<sup>76</sup> (My italics.)

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<sup>73</sup> AG, p. 88.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>75</sup> L, p. 514.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 557-58.



Van Helmont's name was often mentioned by Leibniz in association with the topic of the migration of souls after the period 1694-96. But, as I have just shown, the concept of transformation, which underwrites the possibility of the transmigration of souls from visible body to visible body, was established long before the mid-1690s. However, a case could be made that Leibniz's considerations of Helmontian writings, in particular the *Seder Olam*, might have led to a certain clarification on his part by means of the distinguishing terms of subtle and gross body. I have reported Leibniz's remarks on the *Seder Olam* where he describes how such a revolution could occur when the diminished body of a soul at death can pass out of its former gross body (the domain of the larger soul which it once ruled) and enter another new gross and visible body: all this without strict metempsychosis, or absolute separation of a soul from body. Leibniz also utilizes this argument in the *New Essays*, where it is specifically mentioned in association with van Helmont:

If transmigration is not taken strictly, i.e. if anyone thought that souls remain in the same rarefied bodies and only change their coarse bodies, that would be possible, even to the extent of the same soul's passing into a body of another species in the Brahmin or Pythagorean manner.<sup>77</sup>

The Brahmins and Pythagoreans had asserted the transmigration of souls; and, as Leibniz mentions here, he can see how such could be possible by utilizing the distinction of subtle and gross bodies, and the doctrine of transformation. But this distinction was not always made: In a letter to Simon Foucher, dated 1687/8 (?),

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<sup>77</sup> RB, section 233. See also *ibid.*, section 240: "The late M. van Helmont the younger went further, as I have just said, and believed in the transmigration of souls... For all I know he may, clever man though he was, have believed himself to be one of the ancients. I have explained earlier a way in which the migration of souls is possible (though it does not appear likely) namely that souls might, while retaining rarefied bodies, pass suddenly into other coarse bodies."

Leibniz fails to reconcile the transmigration of souls of the Pythagoreans to his transformation of the same animal:

The Pythagoreans obscured the truth with their metempsychosis; instead of thinking of the transformation of the same animal, they believed, or at least proclaimed, the passage of the soul of one animal into another, which is not to say anything.<sup>78</sup>

It is interesting to note that in words added by Leibniz to *Thoughts on Genesis* he goes out of his way to effect this reconciliation, writing that the doctrine

which the *Pythagoreans* are said to have held; and at this day is attributed to the *Brachmans* or *Bramines*... probably are not so to be understood, as if they held [strict metempsychosis:] that a man might be changed into a beast, but rather, that the humane soul might for a time be confined to the prison of a bestial body.<sup>79</sup>

At the end of the letter to Foucher, just quoted, in which Leibniz asserts his transformation of the same animal, he writes: "these sorts of consideration are not suitable to be seen by everyone". The uneasiness expressed here concerns the possibility that transformation might also apply to human souls, implying their heterodox revolution or re-incarnation. In the letter to Arnauld of 1687 quoted above, Leibniz states outright that "minds are not subject to these revolutions", and goes on to say that "God creates them when it is time and detaches them from the body {at least the coarse body} by death".<sup>80</sup> What is especially remarkable about this, is the extent to which Leibniz flies in the face of several of his most fundamental metaphysical and epistemological principles. Created substances are supposed to have

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<sup>78</sup> *Leibniz's 'New System'*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse and R. Francks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) p. 55; GP, i, 390.

<sup>79</sup> pp. 61-62.

<sup>80</sup> AG, p. 88.

all been produced at once; the soul is essentially inextricable from body (only God is pure spirit); and the appeal to miracles, to special operations of God, should be avoided where reason can hope to provide explanation. A reasonable account is available, indeed demanded if Leibniz's metaphysics of substance is to be coherent - that is, that human souls, like all simple substances, should be revolved. Moreover, since God cannot do anything that involves logical contradiction, he cannot separate souls from bodies, for the notion of an active principle without a passive one is such a logical impossibility. In this quotation, the phrase in curly brackets, "at least the coarse body", was not in the copy of the letter that Arnauld received, for the subtle-gross body distinction is precisely that idea which permits transformation of the same animal and points to the revolution of human souls.

Whereas Leibniz was prepared to invoke the (impossible) special operation of God and reject reason for orthodoxy's sake, the Christian Lurianic kabbalists had no such qualms, and embraced the (Lurianic) revolution of human souls wholeheartedly. Discussing this problem in his remarks on *The Divine Being*, Leibniz accordingly rejects the revolution of human souls, stating that he is "*persuaded*" that their rules of operation are "special laws", i.e. miraculous, and not comprehensible through reason:

I do not wish to extend this doctrine to man nor to the human soul, being persuaded that because the soul contains the image of God within himself, it is governed by special laws, the details of which can only be learned by revelation. And since it appears that Scripture did not wish to explain this matter as much as we might wish, I doubt that we can hope to find in this life as much detail concerning the next life as Mr. Van Helmont seems to give us.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 56.



In the *New System*, Leibniz repeats his assertion that "minds have particular laws, which place them above the revolutions in matter"; but a reason is now given for this: that "minds being like little gods... made in the image of God, [have] in them some ray of the light of divinity".<sup>82</sup> But, as I will show later, all monads in Leibniz's cosmology have some degree of the immanence of God in them.

Words added by Leibniz himself in *Thoughts on Genesis*, quoted above, that the Pythagoreans or Brahmins probably should be understood as if "the humane soul might for a time be confined to the prison of a bestial body" is a point he repeats in the *New Essays*, where he speculates that such is possible "if while in the body of the beast [a human soul] had the thoughts of a man, and even of the man whom it had animated before the change".<sup>83</sup> Whilst there are no obvious indications that Leibniz's kabbalistic interests had a specific effect on the evolution of his handling of this problem, the prominence of the doctrine in what he read and in his discussions with van Helmont, not to mention his work on *Thoughts*, must have impinged on this fraught and conflict-ridden issue in Leibniz's mind. In his *Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit* of 1702, the theological status of the human soul forces Leibniz to make exceptions for it concerning both its origin and destiny. He advances a reasoned explication as to the origin of particular souls, in order to avoid the doctrine that there is but one only universal animating spirit. This explanation is the general one that birth is but the augmentation of pre-existing souls, and that death is the diminution of the soul along with its subtle body. But this essentially rational explication is expected to stand alongside the (miraculous) theological special case concerning human souls. Leibniz "does not deny God the right to create new souls...

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<sup>82</sup> GP, iv, 480.

<sup>83</sup> RB, section 234.

or to give a higher degree of perfection to those already in nature." This is because of "God's particular economy with respect to human souls, which *may be* privileged." <sup>84</sup> (My italics.)

Concerning death, Leibniz is also prepared to allow the possibility of precisely the opposite of what he asserts:

As for the complete separation of soul and body, I can say nothing about the laws of grace, and about the ordinances of God in regard to human souls in particular, beyond what the Holy Scriptures say, since these are things which cannot be known by reason, being dependent on the revelation of God himself. Nevertheless, I see no reason, either religious or philosophical, which compels me to abandon the doctrine of the parallelism of soul and body and to admit a perfect separation. <sup>85</sup>

Even in the *Theodicy* he still vacillates as to whether miraculous operations are to be involved in the existence of human souls. Concerning the elevation of a soul to that of a rational mind, Leibniz describes "a kind of transcreation", in which "God *may* have given reason to this soul through some special operation", which "*is easier to admit*" than if "there be a natural means of raising a sentient soul to the degree of a reasoning soul", which is "a thing I find it *difficult to imagine*", since "revelation teaches much about other forms of immediate operations by God upon our souls." Moreover "this explanation *appears* to remove the obstacles that beset this matter in philosophy or theology." <sup>86</sup> (My italics.) If the language this is couched in is as shaky as anything Leibniz wrote, later on in the book, stating that "I considered also that one might attribute this elevation of the sentient soul... to the extraordinary operation of God", in a further display of his dilemma, he contradicts what he had said earlier by saying

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<sup>84</sup> L, p. 556.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Section 91.

that "nevertheless it will be well to add that I would dispense with miracles in the generating of man".<sup>87</sup>

Finally, in works such as *The Principles of Nature and Grace*, where Leibniz discusses transformation and metempsychosis, he remains silent as to how this might affect human souls.

#### 5.4 The General Continuum

Beings of the world, corporeal substances, consist of a mind and a body, and the relationship between these two is the causal one of emanation. The mind, as a single substance, is the enduring active force, which is the logically anterior sufficient reason for, the emanator of, the body, which itself, as a set of properties, is the transitory passive principle, the logically posterior effect, that which is emanated by the mind. The body of the corporeal substance contains a multiplicity of (sub-) monads. Since a monad is an active principle, every body is therefore said to contain an aggregate of active principles. Now, each of the active principles in this aggregate has its own corresponding passive principle, or body, which together constitute (sub-) corporeal substances. Each of the bodies of these (sub-) corporeal substances contains its own multiplicity of (sub-sub-) monads, each of which is an active principle itself, and so on. Since the divisibility of space is endless, this process itself is endless.

Thus it is that the body of a corporeal substance has both a passive and an active aspect. It is passive when conceived as a whole thing, as a set of properties extended over a single spatial domain, in relation to its (active) mind from which it has been

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<sup>87</sup> Section 397.



emanated. And it is active when conceived as a multiplicity, as a collection of individual monads, each of which is active in relation to its respective (passive) body, which each emanates. But, since individual monads in the body of a corporeal substance, as monads, are their *own* sufficient reasons or emanators of their own respective bodies, the mind of the corporeal substance to which they collectively belong, cannot itself be the sufficient reason for those individual monads of the body. For the monads of the body, as monads, are active principles, emanators, themselves: they are not determined by another, but are the sources of their own properties. *Active* principles are related *only to passive* principles in emanation. The mind of a corporeal substance, *as active* principle, *cannot* be the emanative cause of the *active* principles embedded in its associated body. Rather, the mind is the emanating cause of its body considered only in its passive aspect, i.e. the aggregate body conceived as one whole thing. A mind emanates an aggregate body of monads from out of the plenum of monads, by virtue of its being the spatio-temporal unity of that multiplicity, and which constituent monads are logically subsumed by the mind as their sufficient reason. An analogy will serve to make this clear. Imagine a choir. The choirmaster is responsible for the way the choristers perform *as a whole*, is responsible for the collective voice of the whole choir; but each individual chorister is responsible for his own individual voice, and follows his own score. The mind is the choirmaster; the body in its passive aspect is the choir as one whole aggregate sound; and the body in its active aspect is the multiplicity of individual choristers producing their individual sounds.<sup>88</sup> The subsumption of active principles into one whole passive principle

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<sup>88</sup> See Leibniz to Arnauld, 30 April 1687, in AG, p. 84-85.

under the dominion of a single active principle, is what Leibniz calls concomitance and which is usually known as the doctrine of pre-established harmony.<sup>89</sup>

It has been seen that bodies have both passive and active aspects because of the divisibility of space. But, conversely, because of the aggregability of space, minds too have passive as well as active aspects. They are active in relation to their bodies, but insofar as they can be included in an aggregate consisting of other (active) minds, which as a whole form the body of some "higher" corporeal substance, they are passive. So if a plurality of people, say, can be grouped together according to some common characteristic of behaviour, it can be said of them that not only is each person his own active principle, but as one amongst a body of people, each stands in a passive relation to some more higher dominant mind. What sort of mind this might be is not clear, and this is not developed by Leibniz, but it would seem to fall into the category of the supernatural, and the idea of such super-human agency is not absent from human thinking, e.g. a group of people displaying a common behaviour repugnant to another, might well be accused of being "ruled by the devil"; whilst the accusers themselves may attribute their own behaviour to the "influence of God".

It should now be evident that the beings of the world exist in a chain and because space is both infinitely divisible and infinitely aggregable, the chain of being extends for ever towards the infinitely small and the infinitely large. The search towards the small, of corporeal substances within corporeal substances, of ever-more subordinated monads, will never end in a monad which does not yet embrace a further aggregate of monads: a monad which is not an active principle cannot rationally exist. Therefore there can be no purely passive entity, there can be no prime

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<sup>89</sup> As Christia Mercer notes, "it is important to recognize that Preestablished Harmony is a *version* of Emanative Harmony". See Mercer, p. 301. The "interaction" of monads according to this doctrine is explored at length by her at pp. 300-322. See also Tymieniecka, pp. 116-123.

matter: there must be corporeal substances everywhere endowed with a dominant active principle and a passive principle which is not a body of pure passive primary matter, but a body of secondary matter or which contains active subordinate monads.

In actuality, matter exists, but it is not a substance, since it is an aggregate or repeating of substances: I say this of secondary matter... But that which we... call primary matter, is something incomplete, since it is pure potential...

Extension, or if you like, primary matter, is not other than a certain indefinite repetition of things... Matter merely passive... consists only of the incomplete, or of the abstract.<sup>90</sup>

Conversely, the search towards the large, towards ever higher minds, ever more dominating monads, will never end in a monad which is itself not yet embraced by a further dominant monad: a monad which is not also a passive principle is not possible: there can be no purely active (created) entity: every being of the world must stand in a passive relation to some higher entity.

In summarizing the ultimate nature of the cosmos we may say that at bottom it consists of a plenum of monads, which have absolute relations among themselves according to the order of reason. That which is logically anterior in the order to a group of others is the dominant monad of a group of subordinate monads, or the active mind of the passive body. There is an infinity of ever more dominant and ever more subordinated monads. And all real beings of the universe (the corporeal substances) have the nature of this monadic relationship.

But this objective view of the universe belongs only to the infinite mind of God, because only he is the subject of all the (true) ideas there are. Any subject which embraces less than the infinity of all ideas, has a mind which is merely finite, and has what we call a subjective view of the universe. It will be necessary then to complete

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<sup>90</sup> B, p. 6.



this account of the world according to Leibniz by explaining how he understands the ultimate nature of the finite mind and the processes involved in it.

The monad is a particular idea in God's mind: God's ideas are true, and what is true is a real thing or substance. The ego or soul is a substance, because the self-conscious "I" is an idea whose truth cannot be doubted. (This is one of only a few truths that a finite mind can possess, and Leibniz was in complete agreement with Descartes about this.) And since substances are true ideas in the mind of God, it follows that my soul is an idea in God's mind. Accordingly the description of the ultimate nature of my being, or any worldly finite being, must be based on that of monadology, or the relationships holding between the ideas in God's mind. And so, inasmuch as my soul is a concept in the mind of God, the emanation of my perceptions from my soul, precisely is the emanation of predicates from concepts in God's mind, or the emanation of properties from substances in the objective universe. Because my soul is only one idea amongst the infinity that exist in God, the perceptions that I have, that flow from this single infinitesimal idea, are accordingly limited. Since the mind which does not comprehend all things cannot know whether any one thing of perception is true (since to demonstrate truth is to show how something must be as it is and not otherwise, which involves knowledge of all logically possible things), it follows that the perceptions of finite minds are not equivalent to, do not correspond to, real substances; or, the experiences of worldly beings can only be subjective: the things of my perception have only moral certainty.

It has been seen that absolute force in the Leibnizian metaphysic reduces to emanative power, a sort of force of logic in the absolute order of reason as it exists between an active dominant monad and its related passive set of subordinated monads. Since only God knows monads and the absolute relations of rational

dependency between them, only he knows absolute force, and, therefore, only he knows absolute motion. It is the case that for finite minds, though the things of their perceptions are related by the same principle of active-passive, because of the mere moral certainty of their perceptual objects and their respective relations, the ordering of things by rational dependency is not absolute, but rather an ordering by the (merely) apparent clarity of assignable reason. Thus we may say the sea is the active principle that tosses the passive boat, not by virtue of our possessing an *a priori* reason based on the absolute order of logical dependency between sea and boat, for finite minds cannot calculate *a priori* reasons for worldly events. Rather, we say the sea is the active principle only by virtue of the *a posteriori*: the ordering by empirically assignable reason, or what more easily or clearly appears to be the sufficient reason for the other. Thus, amongst the perceptions of finite minds, the causal relation of active-passive reduces to one of distinctness-confusion (of the assignability of sufficient reason). But because of the mere moral certainty of these perceptions, assignability by distinctness has no basis in truth, thus in the finite mind, force has no absolute reality, and motion is only relative.

That of which the expression is more distinct, is judged to act; that whose expression is more confused, is judged to suffer... And that thing of which the reason of the changes of the state is most easily assigned, is judged to be the cause... And causes are taken to be not from a real influx but from an assignable reason.<sup>91</sup>

That the perceptions of finite beings fail to deliver not only certainty to the relations amongst their objects, but even certainty as to their very existence, means that the finite being cannot strictly know that a plurality of substances even exists, i.e. cannot

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<sup>91</sup> *Specimen Inventorum*, 1697 (?), in GP, vii, 312.

know for certain that there is an external world. Hence a mind of the world finds itself in an empirical solipsism, in a "world apart". And reason, built only on sense-perception, can yield us only the truth and the existence of nothing but one's own soul and God.

Each substance is like a world apart, independent of all other things, except for God; thus all our phenomena, that is, all the things that can ever happen to us, are only consequences of our being...

Nothing can happen to us except thoughts and perceptions... even if everything outside of me were destroyed, provided there remained only God and me.<sup>92</sup>

But that reason demonstrates the existence and nature of God, and his omniscience, thus providing for a true knowledge in the things of *his* perception, and thereby the certain existence of a plurality of substances, is why Leibniz asserts that a finite mind can know that an ultimate nature of the cosmos does exist, in God, and yet cannot know the details of this ultimate nature itself. The rational mind of man knows by *a priori* reason that there is a real world outside the substance which is his soul, and within which he is located; but he cannot know this by *a posteriori* experience. Consequently, Leibniz's metaphysics of the microcosm is conducted following the pattern of monadology laid down by *a priori* reason concerning the ultimate nature of the macrocosm, which is known perceptually to God, but only theoretically to man.

This ultimate nature consists in monads and their mutual relations, the fundamental nature of which is the subsuming of a multiplicity of monads by a single one, by virtue of the single being the sufficient reason for the many. Referring to my previous account of corporeal substances then, I may say that my soul is an enduring active force, what is commonly called desire or appetite, and which emanates a transitory

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<sup>92</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 14, in AG, p. 47.



passive principle, or perceptual state. Now, emanation is that relation which exists between monads, according to which the one is called the dominant monad or active principle to a collection of subordinate monads or a passive principle, in the sense that the dominant is anterior to the subordinate in the logical order of reason. Monads or substances are true ideas or perceptions in God's mind, and inasmuch as true ideas emanate other ideas from them, so the emanating idea is a dominant monad and the emanated ideas are collections of subordinated monads. As the dominant monad (idea) emanates the subordinate monads (ideas), or, in the objective view of the universe, substances emanate properties, so I, as a dominant monad substance, as a true idea in God's mind, emanate collections of subordinate monads or perceptions in my subjective view. That my perceptions simply flow from my soul, from all the logical ramifications included in the concept which is my soul as it exists in the mind of God, implies that "I" do not select or create my perceptions, but rather that "I" am merely their unwilling source. And as far as my experience is concerned, perceptions simply present themselves as they are emanated, emerging with apparent spontaneity.

We do not form our ideas because we will to do so, they form themselves within us, they form themselves through us, not in consequence of our will, but in accordance with our nature.<sup>93</sup>

This emanating power, this force of logic, which connects the concept of my soul to the ideas necessarily implied by it, is that which I experience in my subjective world as desire or appetite. "The action of the internal principle which brings about the change or passage from one perception to another can be called *appetition*." <sup>94</sup>

The passive principle of every corporeal substance is a body or aggregate of

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<sup>93</sup> H, section 403.

<sup>94</sup> *Monadology*, section 15, in AG, p. 215.

subordinate monads emanated by its active principle. In my corporeal substance this is the perceptual state emanated by my soul, the aggregate of subordinated monads, which, since monads are ideas, is itself a collection of smaller perceptions. Leibniz calls them minute perceptions or *petites perceptions*. As an aggregate whole they constitute the actual perceptions which the (sentient) soul has; but, individually, as smaller or weaker elements, though constitutive of the aggregate, which is clear and sensible to the soul, they are in fact confused and insensible in themselves.

These minute perceptions, then, are more effective in their results than has been recognized. They constitute that *je ne sais quoi*, those flavours, those images of sensible qualities, vivid in the aggregate but confused as to the parts...

They are also the insensible parts of our sensible perceptions.<sup>95</sup>

Now, what is passive in relation to the active in a corporeal substance, also has an active aspect too. Thus, in the sense that my present perception is emanated by my soul, it is passive; but in the sense that each of the *petites perceptions* in the sensible aggregate are monads themselves, so they too are each active principles with their own associated collections of monads subordinate to them. Thus, the *petites perceptions*, individually, are dominant monads with their own active emanative force or appetite. This means that, in the same way as my conscious perception is actually constituted of a collection of insensible perceptions, so my conscious desire is constituted of unconscious ones. Here lies a psychological doctrine of hidden drives, later to become central to the work of Sigmund Freud.

The soul does many things without knowing how it does them, when it acts by means of confused perceptions and insensible inclinations or appetitions, of

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<sup>95</sup> RB, sections 55-56.

which there is always so very great a number that it is impossible for the soul to be conscious of them or to separate them distinctly.<sup>96</sup>

But the assertion of the existence of entities beyond what can be known empirically by the finite mind is implicit in Leibniz's explication of the subjective in terms of a rationally established objective universe. Thus:

Insensible perceptions are as important to pneumatology as insensible corpuscles are to natural science, and it is just as unreasonable to reject the one as the other on the pretext that they are beyond the reach of our senses.<sup>97</sup>

The rational order of emanation of perceptions or properties happens whether or not it is apprehended by the substances involved in it: "Must a drop of oil or fat understand geometry in order to become round on the surface of water?"<sup>98</sup>

According to the established objective nature of the cosmos, monads combine to form corporeal substances, both towards the infinitely small and the infinitely large. That is, monads subordinate other monads, which themselves subordinate further monads, *ad infinitum*; and, conversely, monads are dominated by other monads, which themselves are dominated by further monads, *ad infinitum*. This, translated to the subjective view of the particular corporeal substance, means that my perception is not only constituted by the immediate set of *petites perceptions*, or body of monads subordinate to my soul, but that each of these *petites perceptions* do themselves subordinate further *petites perceptions*, and so on, without end. Conversely, my perception, the extent to which it embraces truth (a function of the extent to which it embraces all possible concepts), is itself a constituent in some aggregate of

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<sup>96</sup> *Extrait du Dictionnaire de M. Bayle article Roraius p. 2599 sqq. de l'Édition de l'an 1702 avec mes remarques*, in GP, iv, 550.

<sup>97</sup> RB, section 56.

<sup>98</sup> H, section 403.



perceptions, which, as a whole, provides the soul of that aggregate with a perception of greater extent than mine. Or, at least, this is possible, for theoretically the objective universe is that infinite series of corporeal substances, of monads that ever subsume more monads *ad infinitum*, and of monads that are ever subsumed by more monads, *ad infinitum*. Thus, though ultimately in the objective view of the universe, the particular soul exists somewhere within an open-ended chain of being, itself subsuming an infinity of monads in one direction, and being subsumed by another infinity in the other direction, because it is a finite being, the extent to which it unites other monads into a sensible clear perception, is limited: it has a merely subjective or bounded view of the actual objective and unbounded universe. In other words, the objective nature of the universe is that it extends towards the infinitely large and the infinitely small; and the apparent limits to both these are actually merely the limits of *discernibility* of the particular soul. So the physical point is merely what appears to be a limit in the direction of smallness; and the microscope, by separating the unaided-eye image of what seems to be a smallest thing, actually reveals it to be an aggregate of images. Conversely, the boundaries of the universe are merely the limits of discernibility in the direction of the large: for the telescope, by gathering individually imperceptible and confused traces of light into a unity, produces a new and larger image.

All monads in the objective view of the cosmos are ideas in God's mind, and in as much as he is the subject of each of these perceptions, he sees or knows or represents all monads with unlimited clarity. But the finite mind, or individual monad, is the subject of only those perceptions which flow from its single and particular concept: what it sees, knows, represents, is of limited clarity. Leibniz defines three categories of monad based on the degree to which a monad represents others, which in the

subjective view of that particular monad, is the degree of clarity of its perception or degree of consciousness. Since the true nature of the relationship between monads is an open-ended continuum of subsuming and being subsumed, there can be no absolute measure of representation, therefore the Leibnizian categories of perception are ultimately arbitrary, and arranged relative to the human position on this continuum.

It is just as reasonable that there should be substances capable of perception below us as above us, so that our soul, far from being the lowest of all, finds itself in the middle, from which one may rise or sink.<sup>99</sup>

The "soul" monad is that whose clarity of perception is "conscious", and which is effected by what we call memory. When the soul's memory is impaired, or when the senses are disrupted (e.g. in dizziness), or when we dream, then perception is confused relative to normal clarity; and in a dreamless sleep, or where memory is entirely absent, it sinks to the level of confusion we call "unconscious". This reduction of clarity in the subjective view is correlative to the number of monads that a dominant monad subordinates or represents of the objective view; but since, in this objective view, subordination of monads continues *ad infinitum*, and in ever reducing numbers, it is the case that subjective perception ever diminishes in clarity, but there is no ultimate perception of absolute confusion. On the other hand, when a soul with conscious perception, has, in addition to memory, the faculty of abstraction, then it acquires "knowledge of the eternal truths" (the first of which is that there is an "I"). This soul is then "self-conscious". "Thus, in thinking of ourselves, we think of being, of substance, of the simple and of the composite, of the immaterial and of God

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<sup>99</sup> *Considerations on Vital Principles and Plastic Natures*, 1705, in L, p. 588.

himself." <sup>100</sup> With metaphysical ideas the perception of a soul increases in clarity to the category of rational mind. But there is no upper limit to the clarity of the subjective view, for monads can increase the number of monads they subsume *ad infinitum*.

### *Comparison*

In Leibniz's corporeal substance a soul has, in addition to its active aspect as sufficient reason for its body, a passive aspect. This is its relationship to a higher antecedent reason of which it is but one only of a collection or body of subordinate monads. And because an infinity of monads is a literally endless supply of active principles, no matter how far up the chain of sufficient reason, or souls, one proceeds, there will never be reached (in the cosmos) a single soul monad, which is not yet further subsumed, does not stand in need of a sufficient reason, that is, does not yet have a passive aspect. In other words, there is no created soul which is pure activity or pure spirit. Conversely, the body of a corporeal substance, whilst passive in relation to its soul of immediate association, is a collection of monads, each of which is a sufficient reason or soul or active principle for its own body or sub-collection of monads. Again, by virtue of the endless supply of monads, there can be no body or collection of monads which does not yet have an active aspect in relation to some further subordinated monads; and there can be no purely passive being, no prime matter.

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<sup>100</sup> *Monadology*, section 30, in AG, p. 217.



I have shown that the Christian Lurianic kabbalists reached the same conclusions because they had based their conceptions of the soul and body on the same notions as did Leibniz, viz. that the soul is an active spirit to a passive bodily collection of spirits, and that spirits exist in an infinite number or plenum. Leibniz, clarifying the notes he took from van Helmont, writes in *Thoughts on Genesis*:

Every part of the World hath its own Expansion, as well as something above the same, by which it is governed and assisted; yet is the whole Expansion altogether Infinite: And tho' there be a present limited Sphere to every Expansion, yet have they a power of stretching or spreading themselves more and more, without end.<sup>101</sup>

Hence, this is not an expression of pure amanuensis alone, but is also a concord of the thoughts of the kabbalist with Leibniz.

In the other direction of the continuum there can be no purely passive or wholly material body. In the *Seder Olam* there are the words:

As every Spirit or Soul in the whole creatural system is a Body... so every Body is in some degree or measure Animal and Spiritual, i.e. hath Life, Sense and Knowledge.<sup>102</sup>

Leibniz notes of this that:

It appears also probable enough that there is no corporeal substance in nature that is not endowed with some kind of life, soul, or perception, or at least with some entelechy or force of acting.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> pp. 49-50.

<sup>102</sup> Section 30.

<sup>103</sup> Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 60; FoL, p. 50.

Whether this "probable enough" indicates that this concept is not yet established in Leibniz's mind, or is a mere reticence to appear too much in agreement with van Helmont, I shall examine below.

The hierarchy of rulership, as it cascades from soul to body, from the souls collected in that body to their own sub-bodies, and so on, is likened by van Helmont and Conway to the command structure of an army, which is transmitted down the strata of ranks, each rank being responsible for a smaller and smaller group of men below it. This analogy seems to have been one already fixed in Leibniz's mind when he read *The Divine Being*, for in his resume of it, referring to paragraph 94 where it states "that the body hath its own proper life, over and above its being governed by the soul or its principal spirit", Leibniz *adds* that "The soul of man directs as a general his army".<sup>104</sup> This expression is not used in the paragraph of the text.

Now, this cascade of rulership down the chain of being in the passive direction of the continuum is endless. I have indicated (p. 76) that in the biblical phrase "darkness was upon the face of the deep", "darkness" is interpreted by van Helmont as that passivity which characterizes the "deep", or abyss, that is the endless, bottomless, continuum of the "faces" or spirit beings of nature. When Leibniz puts van Helmont's thoughts together, he adds his own words to elucidate what these "faces" are, and which clearly coincide with his own conception of the monad:

Faces are substances, or individual singular things, subsisting by themselves, even spirits or souls, and, as it were, persons, for the Greek word PROSOPON signifies a *person* as well as a face; and that because every *person*, or rather every *subject*, or *suppositum*, hath a kind of face whereby it is known and distinguished.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> OK, ii, 1069.

<sup>105</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, pp. 23-24.

Continuing, Leibniz explains that:

An *abyss* is a *deep*, whose fund [foundation], ground, or bottom is far off, that is, at a very great distance, or rather that hath none at all... Wherefore by *abyss* here we are to understand infinity, which is without any bottom or end. Moreover, this abyss or infiniteness is everywhere, and that not only in God, but also in the creatures, for not the light only is infinite, but the darkness also.<sup>106</sup>

This is a symbolic account of Leibniz's own conception of the continuum.

It appears that Leibniz's ideas on the continuum were not significantly influenced by his kabbalistic interests. As early as 1668-9, in the *Survey of Catholic Demonstrations*, Leibniz had written:

The continuum is divisible into infinity... The end limit is not given, and beatitude does not consist in the ceasing of appetite, but in an unimpeded progression to ends always beyond it.<sup>107</sup>

In *On the True Theologia Mystica* of 1690 (?) Leibniz explains the doctrine in theological terms. The plenum of created substances is essentially an infinity of finitudes, in relationships of activity and passivity, or being and non-being, or God and nothingness. Since every monad has some activity and some passivity in it (subordinates, and is subordinated by, other monads), Leibniz writes: "All creatures derive from God and from nothingness. Their self-being is of God, their non-being is of nothing." And however much a creature may expand and increase its active vitality, it cannot escape having some element of passivity or non-being: "No creature can be without non-being; otherwise it would be God."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>107</sup> A, 6, I, 499.

<sup>108</sup> L, p. 368.



The doctrine of the continuum implies not only that there is no maximum expansion, no purely active monad, but also that there is no minimum: no smallest corporeal substance: no soul which is not yet a sufficient reason for some others, and does not have some domain over which it is the ruling principle. In other words, there is no created soul which is pure passivity: souls with ever less vitality and perception must exist without end. This conclusion concerning the continuum was also reached by the Christian Lurianic kabbalists. In the *Seder Olam* it says that "every Body is in some degree or measure Animal and Spiritual, i.e. hath Life, Sense and Knowledge", <sup>109</sup> and I have indicated above that Leibniz describes this assertion, that every creature must have some minimum life and perception, as "probable enough". The reservation pertaining to this comment seems somewhat disingenuous, for the doctrine of the continuum had been established in Leibniz's mind for a long time. <sup>110</sup> The reason for any such holding back would have come from Leibniz's needing not to appear too much in agreement with a publication that was causing controversy amongst some clerics.

Though the *Seder Olam* was not a source for Leibniz of the concept that there is no absolutely passive substance, it might be that this kabbalistic encounter marked the start of some deeper considerations on the nature of the diminishing direction of the continuum. In the following year, 1695, in his *Dialogue on Human Freedom*, Leibniz sets out the nature of created things in terms of both their similarity and difference from God. As in *On the True Theologia Mystica* he distinguishes two principles: being, which ultimately flows from God, and non-being, or nothingness. These are also the principles of activity and passivity, for which God is unlimited or pure

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<sup>109</sup> Section 30.

<sup>110</sup> See also *On the Elements of Natural Science* of 1682-4, where Leibniz writes that there is no minimum or zero vitality and perception, but rather that "all bodies are able to have some perception according to the measure of their perfection". L, p. 279.

infinite activity; and creature, as what by definition is limited, is defective or finite activity. The extent to which a creature is limited determines the extent to which passivity, non-being or nothingness "enters into" it; or, the extent to which the vitality it has, is a privation or negation or lack of perfection of, the attributes of God. Discussing this issue in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom* in relation to good and evil, Leibniz writes:

The Platonists and Saint Augustine himself have already shown us that the cause of good is positive, but that evil is a defect, that is, a privation or negation, and consequently, it arises from nothingness or nonbeing.<sup>111</sup>

The same is asserted in *De homine*, notes taken down by Leibniz based on conversations with van Helmont: "Nothing is evil and evil is nothing. God makes all things, so he makes no evil. Evil comes from privation, which creatures have in themselves."<sup>112</sup>

What is of particular interest to me now is that Leibniz asserts in the *Dialogue* that the positive or active force which is infinite in God, is matched by the infinity of its privation or negation. Leibniz is speaker B:

A- How did sin come into the world, since God, the creator of the world, is infinitely good and infinitely powerful? To account for sin there must be another infinite cause capable of counterbalancing the influence of divine goodness.

B- I can name you such a thing.

A- You would therefore be a Manichean, since you admit two principles, one of good and the other of evil.

B- You yourself will acquit me of this charge of Manicheanism when I name this other principle.

A- Then please name it now, sir.

B- It is nothingness.

A- Nothingness? But is nothingness infinite?

B- No doubt it is; it is infinite, it is eternal, and it has many attributes in

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<sup>111</sup> AG, p. 114.

<sup>112</sup> OK, ii, 1057-58 (not in Grua).

common with God. It includes an infinity of things, for all things that do not exist are included in nothingness, and all things that are no longer have returned into nothingness.<sup>113</sup>

In other words, all force has its origin in God. The closer a creature is to God, the more active and good it is; and the further from God it is, the more passive and evil it is. And since this privation is infinite, there must be an unending series of creatures ever further from God, and ever more passive.

This conception in Leibniz's mind met its symbolic counterpart in the ideas expressed by van Helmont for *Thoughts on Genesis*. In the notes Leibniz took down from van Helmont, the latter uses light as a metaphor for activity, and dark for passivity. To the extent that the being, the activity, of a creature flows originally from God, it partakes of light; to the extent that it is limited, it partakes of passivity or darkness: Every creature "was a heaven, or a light, though dark was included in it." God, as unlimited being, is therefore pure activity, or "only in Jehova is there light without dark."<sup>114</sup> Leibniz includes this in the edition, and adds his own emphasis concerning the distinction of creature from God, viz. that the creature is by definition limited and so is always with some passivity or dark:

Darkness... remains, as being necessary in a creature state, because otherwise the creatures would not be distinguished from God, or Jehovah, who is light without darkness... Darkness... is never taken away from the creature.<sup>115</sup>

Light and dark are also correlated to good and evil in the draft notes and which Leibniz describes more clearly in the edition: "Light, good, and love are one and the same; and so, on the other hand, darkness, evil, and hatred".<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> AG, p. 113.

<sup>114</sup> OH, I, 86; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35r: "Horum quilibet coelum erat, vel lux, etsi tenebrae in ipso essent inclussae... In solo enim Jehova lux est sine tenebris".

<sup>115</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, pp. 22-23.



It can now be seen how the two principles of being, activity and goodness, and non-being, passivity and evil, as conceived in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom*, found a correspondence in the metaphorical principles of light and dark of *Thoughts on Genesis*.

In the same essay Leibniz had written of nothingness that "it is infinite, it is eternal... It includes an infinity of things..." This conclusion that as well as the infinity of God there is a passive direction of the continuum which is also infinite, finds a metaphorical correlate in van Helmont's darkness: "There must be infinite darkness... From where the abyss or that which has no bottom is attributed." There is "the infinite light and the infinite dark."<sup>117</sup>

As for the "infinity of things" in the abyss, van Helmont had said that:

Light conquers dark, and still being of the infinite it works out infinite things... As many as there are creatures in the abyss, so there are faces of darkness, namely an infinity.<sup>118</sup>

Leibniz writes, using the Helmontian metaphors, how it is darkness, or limitation by differentiation, that produces multiplicity out of the light of the one divine being:

If light had nothing to resist or oppose it, there could be no reflection or refraction. Wherefore darkness is upon the faces of the abyss, or infinite deep...

Darkness was upon the innumerable faces that lay hid in the abyss.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 22. Van Helmont's corresponding thoughts were noted down by Leibniz at OH, I, 87-91; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36.

<sup>117</sup> OH, I, 88; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36: "Tenebrae infinitae esse debent... Unde tenebris tribuitur abyssus seu quod non habet fundum... infinita lux ut tenebrae infinitae".

<sup>118</sup> OH, I, 88-89; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36: "Lux tenebras vicit, et infinitae adhuc infinitis laborabit... Quot creaturae in abyssu tot facies tenebrarum, nempe infinitae".

<sup>119</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p. 23.

The basic conception of the continuum, with the infinite God at its head, whose essence (light) is differentiated into the infinite abyss, had already been expressed in the *On the True Theologia Mystica* of 1690, and in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom* of 25 January 1695. Furthermore, as the draft notes of *Thoughts* make clear (and which were taken down in August of 1696), van Helmont too had the same conception, dressed up in symbolic kabbalistical garb. Therefore, the edition which Leibniz produced is a literal convergence of the philosopher's doctrine and the kabbalist's doctrine, on this particular issue.

In the *Discourse on Metaphysics* of ten years earlier, Leibniz had described God's omniscient perception of all things in all possible universes as "the *altitudinem divitarum*, the depth and abyss of divine wisdom".<sup>120</sup> But the metaphors are taken further and applied to the created world in *Thoughts on Genesis*, an echo of which can be seen in *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* of the following year, where Leibniz writes that "because of the infinite divisibility of the continuum, there are always parts asleep in the abyss of things."<sup>121</sup>

## 5.5 On the Categorization of Simple Substances

On the continuum, the body of any particular creature can never be absolutely passive, nor can its soul be absolutely active: rather, these two are merely relative poles, situated on the open-ended cosmic continuum of monads, not to be absolutely distinguished. This is why the terms corresponded to the soul and the body, by the Christian Lurianic kabbalists, can be described in terms of each other.

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<sup>120</sup> Section 30, in AG, p. 61.

<sup>121</sup> AG, p. 155.

In Leibniz, the soul, as a single monad, is both the substance which its bodily set of properties inheres in, and is the sufficient reason or cause of those properties. Since, in his transcendental rationalism, a substance is the idea or perception of a true subject (in God's mind), so the bodily properties of a soul are a set of ideas, or perceptions, which are emanated by the soul. Moreover, the body itself is a multitude of monads, each of which both possesses a further bodily subset of properties or perceptions. Leibniz calls these *petites perceptions*, and the emanator of these, a *petite* appetite. Since nature is an "abyss", this emanation of ever smaller perceptions, or subordination of ever less vital monads, continues without end. Conversely, moving up from the abyss, every soul monad is one idea amongst a collection of ideas emanated by souls with ever greater perceptions, or are subordinated by ever more vital monads, *ad infinitum*. Within this continuum Leibniz describes three categories of monads based on three ranges of degrees for which a monad is the unitary principle, or "represents to itself", or has the perception of, a group of other monads. The greater the degree of representation, the greater the clarity of the monad's perception. The middle category contains "soul" monads, whose clarity of perception is what we call "conscious", or has reason. The highest category contains those monads called "rational", that is, those whose clarity has advanced to grasping *a priori* truths. Since the perception of the "I" is the first of these truths, according to Leibniz, "self-consciousness" is a cardinal characteristic of this category. The lowest category contains "bare" monads, what we call "unconsciousness"; and on account of their lack of memory, their perception is confused. On account of the continuum it has to be assumed that the upper and lower



categories extend indefinitely with neither absolute clarity nor absolute confusion ever being reached.

I have shown that the Christian Lurianic kabbalists took over the three worlds of the Jewish kabbalists, *Beri'ah*, *Yezirah* and *Assiyah*, and that these effectively represent three strata of the spirit continuum. The *Neshamah* spirits of *Beri'ah* are the active principles of the bodies, or collections of *ru'ah* spirits, in *Yezirah*. These *ru'ah* spirits, as well as forming the passive principle or body of a *neshamah* spirit, are each, also the active principles of the bodies, or collections of *nefesh* spirits, in *Assiyah*. Each strata of spirits is related to the one above or below it, according to the logical order of nature: that emanative relationship of active-passive as it applies in general to the soul-body relationship. Accordingly, a particular world of spirits, or stratum of the continuum, will be less vital and more dense or gross than the one above it, and, as passive principle, will be its vehicle. The spirit above, as active principle, emanates, radiates, the lower. As Leibniz notes in his own words from the *Seder Olam*:

The most gross [of these spirits] is the vehicle for the others, thus *nephesh* for *ruah*, *ruah* for *neshamah*, and... on the other hand, the most subtle penetrates and illuminates the other by its rays.<sup>122</sup>

In the world of *Assiyah*, which is our visible world, Leibniz notes that this is "where a stupidity or kind of death overcomes the souls". But this world is not a place of bodies uniformly without any vitality at all, for, as Leibniz further notes, "this [stupidity or death] should however only be understood comparatively, because there is life and corporeity everywhere".<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> FoL, p. 51.

<sup>123</sup> FoL, p. 50.

I have mentioned that in *Thoughts on Genesis* van Helmont does not refer to kabbalistic worlds, but we do find another nomenclature for the tripartite categorization of the continuum, in the form of the division of the waters, which is based on verses 6 and 7 of chapter 1 of Genesis. Leibniz, in summarizing van Helmont's thoughts, describes three types of waters, or bands of the continuum, and which are distinguished by the extent to which active and divine governance, or the light, is dominant:

This division [is] of the Super-Celestial, Celestial and Inferiour Waters, or the Light Triumphant, the Light prevailing, but still fighting, and the Light overcome and subdued.<sup>124</sup>

But concerning these "inferiour Waters", or the world of *Assiyah*, he writes: "The Waters below the Heaven, which afforded matter to the Earth, or dry Land, were those, in which, upon the Fall, Confusion and Darkness did prevail".<sup>125</sup> And this fallen stratum is discussed elsewhere in *Thoughts on Genesis*, where it is referred to as *Adamah*. When Leibniz produced his version of this *Adamah* he added several colourful phrases to the basic conception that van Helmont had discussed with him. The stratum of *Adamah* is that of the de-vitalized spirits of *nefesh* which collectively make material bodies: The "body of *Adam* was made out of the dust of *Adamah*, which is the matter of the world, as yet dark, and the flesh or blood of things."<sup>126</sup> It "forms the corruptible body of all things, the flesh garment, the dark bark or shell".<sup>127</sup> But since the spirits of this realm are also active principles which subordinate other spirits, so too creatures exist even here: "Every least dust, of this dust [*Adamah*], is a

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<sup>124</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p. 50.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

creature hidden as yet." <sup>128</sup> Following van Helmont's use of "worms" as the lowest discernible form of life, Leibniz writes that "*Adamah*... is, *the slime*, or imperfect blood of the Earth, but yet living, and consisting of a confluence or swarm of innumerable worms" <sup>129</sup> and "which do swarm in the depth or bottom of all earthly matter, and from whence all other bodies are formed." <sup>130</sup> That the stratum of *Adamah* is not that of spirits absolutely devoid of life, but rather of a comparative death only, is further illustrated by Leibniz's play on words of opposing meaning: "*Adamah* is... a living death, and animated corruption... the life of death, and the death of life." <sup>131</sup> This *Adamah* then, along with the kabbalistic worlds, represents categories of the continuum of nature, at least within the metaphysics of Christian Lurianic kabbalism.

I have argued that Christian Lurianic Kabbalah is an idealistic rationalism: that the spirit continuum, as well as being one of degrees of vitality, of relative activity-passivity, is also one of degrees of knowledge. Accordingly, the *nefesh* spirits of *Assiyah*, or *Adamah*, are those less active spirits of material body, the animal vitality; the *ru'ah* spirits of *Yezirah* are the active principles of visible bodies, or are souls; and the *neshamah* spirits of *Beri'ah* are those rational minds which rule mere *ru'ah* souls. It is to be concluded that, since these categories are imposed on an open-ended continuum, the upper and lower ones, like Leibniz's rational mind monads and bare monads, extend indefinitely. Thus the rational *neshamah* minds can be increased in clarity without end, which is the approach to the neo-Platonic apprehension of God, though one not ever attainable; and the *nefesh* animal spirits can be decreased in clarity also without end.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 103.



It should be clear now that this tripartite division of the spirit continuum exactly parallels that which Leibniz applies to his monadic continuum:

*Neshamah* spirits in *Beri'ah* = rational monads.

*Ru'ah* spirits in *Yezirah* = soul monads.

*Nefesh* spirits in *Assiyah* or *Adamah* = bare monads.

In kabbalism, the three worlds come together in a single human being. That is, a man has a material body (*Assiyah*), a soul which is its active principle (*Yezirah*) and a mind whose rationality bears something of a trace of God. This scheme is outlined in *The Divine Being*, where the author seeks to corroborate it by biblical word, rather than by kabbalism:

He that shall read the Holy Scriptures with attention, will find that they speak of three beings in man: to wit, of *the image or spirit of God*; of *the soul*, and of *the body*.<sup>132</sup>

In his resume of this book, Leibniz notes: "Light is spirit; force is soul; mass is body".<sup>133</sup> Light is the natural light of reason as possessed by the mind monad; force is the activity of a mere (non-rational) soul monad; and mass is the bodily collection of bare monads. But it is in his resume of the *Seder Olam* that Leibniz comments extensively on the worlds of the kabbalists.

The collections of spirits in the world of *Assiyah* make bodies which appear visible to us, because their constituent spirits are lacking in vitality and coalesce into visible matter. On the other hand spirits higher up the continuum of vitality, for example, in

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<sup>132</sup> Section 38.

<sup>133</sup> OK, ii, 1067.

*Yezirah*, form bodies that are too subtle to be discerned, and remain invisible. This same analysis of the visibility of matter is what had led Leibniz to say that angels had bodies too subtle to be seen; and so, commenting on the *Seder Olam*, he writes:

The difference between visible and invisible bodies corresponds to our way of thinking but does not in any way mean there is a change of kind. Thus if *ruah* is nothing else but a subtle body, one should not distinguish it from other bodies, except as specks of dust which flit about in the rays of the sun are distinguished from pebbles.<sup>134</sup>

I have said that the Helmontian tripartite division of the continuum is paralleled in Leibniz's own division of the continuum into three categories of monads. In the same set of remarks Leibniz approves the distinction of spirits into intelligences (rational minds) and (ordinary) souls, though he is cautious about the third distinction concerning the least vital spirits. But he goes on to warn:

But all that [the three differentiations of spirit] only makes up one world which continues and contains all these different entities endowed with organized bodies according to their abilities.<sup>135</sup>

Leibniz is making the point that these three distinctions of spirit do not represent ontologically separate types, for which they might constitute three absolutely separate realms of being, or three worlds. Rather, there is but one world, consisting of one type of being, the monad or spirit substance, and this world is a continuum in which creatures variously exist, positioned according to their activity or clarity of perception. Leibniz here fashions his criticism against the kabbalistic worlds as literally separate realms of being. And so, further on in his commentary, he writes:

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<sup>134</sup> FoL, pp. 51-52.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

Following reason, if the different degrees of creatures formed different worlds, there would be nothing that obliged us to stop at the three worlds of the author... Thus, it is more reasonable to recognize an infinity of degrees in the perfections of the creation in the same world than to make different worlds, which only serves to astonish people with the novelty of the opinion.<sup>136</sup>

But, as I have shown, the kabbalistic "worlds", as least in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, should really represent bands of degrees of perfection in the same one spirit world; and Leibniz himself similarly divided this one world up. Whilst the kabbalists use of the term "worlds" is an unfortunate one, the *Seder Olam*, at the same time, does assert the doctrine of the continuum. This is evident also in the remarks by Leibniz quoted above that the difference between visible and invisible bodies "does not in any way mean there is a change of kind" (i.e. the difference between *ru'ah* spirits or soul monads, and *nefesh* spirits or bare monads, is not one of ontological kind but only of degree of perception on a spirit continuum). There is also the further remark that the vitality of *nefesh* spirits "should however only be understood comparatively, because there is life and corporeity everywhere".

The description by the kabbalists that souls descend from superior to inferior worlds is a metaphorical parallel to Leibniz's thoughts on this issue. Leibniz writes that the description of a soul travelling from one world into another "is to use metaphorical expressions": it cannot be literally true "since revelation does not explain anything about this". However, insofar as "a soul may change its condition and increase or decrease in perfection" the description concurs with the Leibnizian doctrine and therefore is "truthful".<sup>137</sup>

When Leibniz encounters the tripartite division of substances in the *Seder Olam*, he

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<sup>136</sup> FoL, pp. 53-54.

<sup>137</sup> FoL, pp. 53.



agrees that there is a difference between rational spirits and ordinary (non-rational) souls, but is cautious about the further differentiation that van Helmont makes between these two and a third lower grade:

It is however true that there is some difference between spirits or intelligences and between souls and that one *could perhaps* join to them souls or entelechies *inferior* to them.<sup>138</sup>

The reluctance expressed here seems to be genuine, for before this time Leibniz only ever makes a clear distinction of substances in terms of the rational and non-rational. I am not suggesting that Leibniz would deny that there are simple substances inferior (in perception, vitality, perfection) to the souls of animals: indeed such is implicit in his doctrine of the continuum. I merely point out that, as far as I know, before the late 1690s, Leibniz does not explicitly mention three types of simple substances.

Leibniz read of these three kabbalistic categories of the *Seder Olam* in 1694. In 1696 in *Thoughts on Genesis* he is involved in describing this tripartite division of nature according to van Helmont, and the specific features which pertain to the third and lowest category of spirits, which set it apart from the other two. This lowest category is the "inferior waters" or "light overcome", and is that which after the Fall produced matter, confusion and darkness, and which, inasmuch as it corresponds to the lowest kabbalistic world of *Assiyah*, is constituted of those *nefesh* spirits, whose vitality is of that grade inferior to those of *ru'ah* souls. Van Helmont also refers to this material category as *Adamah*, and is noted as having said that "In the dust of *Adamah* there are as many dust particles as creatures or as worms".<sup>139</sup> Bodies are formed of the dust of *Adamah*, for which each particle of dust is a living creature itself. Leibniz

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<sup>138</sup> FoL, p. 51. My italics.

<sup>139</sup> OH, I, 100; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 38r: "In pulvere Adamha tot pulvisculi quot creaturae sive quot vermes."

engaged with this particular description of the *Adamah*, writing in the published edition that the: "*Adamah*... consist[s] of an innumerable host of little animals, even as many as it hath smallest particales of dust." <sup>140</sup> Leibniz's notion that every particle of matter contains innumerable creatures converges here with van Helmont's ideas, where it finds metaphorical expression in van Helmont's clearly expressed third and lowest division of the continuum, the *Adamah*, or the world of *Assiyah*.

The "worms", as the exemplars of the invisible animals in the stratum below ordinary souls, would not have been purely metaphorical to Leibniz and van Helmont, but had a basis in nature as the lowest (discernible) forms of life, as the microscopists had revealed. Leibniz had written about this as early as 1669 in a letter to Jacob Thomasius, where he says that "since we know that putrefaction consists in little worms invisible to the naked eye, any putrid infection is an alteration of man, a generation of the worm." <sup>141</sup> Leibniz frequently refers to the microscopists and certainly didn't discover in van Helmont the idea of worms as a form of life inferior to that of ordinary souls. But it will be interesting to see the extent to which, if at all, a third category of living substances comes to be established in Leibniz after the mid-1690s, and the extent to which "worms" is employed as an exemplar of the life forms of this category.

In *On Nature Itself*, written in 1698, two years after *Thoughts on Genesis*, Leibniz speaks of a substance which is a "soul or a form analogous to a soul", which is "a first entelechy, that is, a certain urge or primitive force of acting". He uses the term "monad" which he had recently adopted, describing this "form analogous to a soul" as "what I usually call a *monad*, in which there is something like perception and

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<sup>140</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p. 113.

<sup>141</sup> L, p. 96.

appetite". He adds that "nor is there any reason why souls or things analogous to souls should not be everywhere." <sup>142</sup>

The "monad" here, which is *analogous* to a soul, with *something like* perception and appetite, and which exists everywhere, is what will later be the "bare monad", the lowest category of the genus "monad".

Later in the same year, in a letter to Johann Bernoulli, Leibniz explains how the form, or bare monad, represents a species itself: "If you have a clear idea of a soul, you will also have a clear idea of a form; for it is of the same genus, though a different species." <sup>143</sup> No matter how bereft of life a piece of nature may seem, for example, a stone, the principle of a vital continuum requires that (bare) monads of relatively inferior activity exist to be found:

I hardly know how far the flint should be divided so that organic bodies (and therefore [bare] monads) might occur; but I readily declare that our ignorance on the matter has no effect on nature. <sup>144</sup>

And in an echo of the "dust of *Adamah*" of *Thoughts on Genesis*, he also writes:

Nature knows no boundary... There could be, indeed, there have to be, worlds not inferior in beauty and variety to ours in the smallest motes of dust, indeed, in tiny atoms. <sup>145</sup>

In another letter to Bernoulli the following month, Leibniz again describes his wish to define (bare) monads as a species of soul, distinguished by their indiscernibility: "I wanted whatever other primitive entelechies there may be remote from our senses to

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<sup>142</sup> AG, pp. 162-63.

<sup>143</sup> 18 November 1698, in AG, p. 168.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> AG, p. 169.



be conceived on analogy with souls". But their notion is still far from being clearly developed: "I confess that they are not conceived perfectly." <sup>146</sup>

In the June of 1699, Leibniz writes to de Volder of entelechies separately classified from ordinary souls: "When you ask further if an inanimate body has its own entelechies 'distinct from the soul', I reply that it has innumerable such entelechies." <sup>147</sup>

The use of "worms" to represent indiscernible life forms had been used in the correspondence to Bernoulli quoted above. But in a letter of January 1699, Leibniz extends the use beyond the more straightforward reference to those bacterial life forms revealed by the microscope, and asks, concerning the

parts in cheese in which there appear to be no worms... What prevents there from being other smaller worms or plants in those parts in turn... and so *ad infinitum*, so that there would be nothing in the cheese free from such things? <sup>148</sup>

That an infinity of such "worms" exists in the abyss of nature, reminds one of Leibniz's words in *Thoughts on Genesis*, that *Adamah* "consist[s] of a confluence or swarm of innumerable worms". And to de Volder in the letter above, he writes how every body is "a place of confluence, like a cheese filled with worms". <sup>149</sup>

These expressions suggest that some of the metaphors Leibniz had met with in his collaboration with van Helmont led to their use as analogies for illustrating points being made in his philosophical writings.

Although the three categories of monad are not systematically presented until 1714, in the *Principles of Nature and Grace* and *The Monadology*, the idea of a third

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<sup>146</sup> 17 December 1698, in AG, p. 170.

<sup>147</sup> L, p. 520.

<sup>148</sup> AG, p. 170.

<sup>149</sup> L, p. 521.

species of soul, in addition to the previous two of the rational and non-rational, seems to begin to crystallize in Leibniz's mind in the late-1690s. It could be argued that his considerations of the three species of substances in van Helmont's works, played a part in such a crystallization.

There is a further issue concerning the species of monads, which this study brings to light: an issue that involves a clash of Leibniz's rational cosmology and his theology. I have argued that Christian Lurianic Kabbalah asserts that nature is a continuum. This implies that created spirits differ amongst themselves only by degree (degree of vitality, perception, perfection) and not by ontological kind; which means that the kabbalistic "worlds" are only bands of degrees on the spirit continuum. This contradicts what van Helmont says in other places concerning these worlds, namely that they *are* ontologically separate realms of spirit beings, as is evidenced both by his identification of the world of *Assiyah* with the existence of matter, and by his asserting that this world exists for a definite age, i.e. with a beginning and end, before and after which it did not exist. When Leibniz criticizes this idea of worlds as realms of being separated ontologically and temporally from the rest of the created world, he accuses van Helmont of being "not well-informed about the constitution of the universe".<sup>150</sup> I would suggest that van Helmont *was* well-informed because of his assertion that nature is a continuum, but not well-informed inasmuch as he adopted the kabbalistic system of literally separate worlds, which conflicts with the doctrine of the continuum. However, despite this explicit objection to the ontological separation of creatures, Leibniz proceeds to add that "whether all these entelechies are of the same kind... is not yet decided". It is certainly decided from a rational point of view, as being "more reasonable... than to make different worlds";

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<sup>150</sup> A, 1, xi, 22.

but Leibniz's indecision now is due to a theological conflict, for, if all entelechies are of the same kind, there is "the result that the lowest could arrive at the condition of the most noble". <sup>151</sup> In other words, it would be "more reasonable" that human souls developed from less noble ones, but theologically heterodox to say so. I have already addressed the extent to which Leibniz perverted his rational cosmology to accommodate theological requirements, in respect of the human soul, when I discussed the question of re-incarnation earlier in this chapter. But in some ways Leibniz's phrase "is not yet decided" is a bold one: even to hold open the possibility that reason might over-rule theology is a heresy in itself.

Summarizing what this comparative work has revealed, the following may be said. Both Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists apply a common tripartite categorization to created substances. Leibniz's three types of monad have metaphorical parallels in the spirits of the three worlds of the kabbalists and in the three kinds of waters and lights of *Thoughts on Genesis*. Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists shared the principle that created substances exist on a vitalistic continuum. I have pointed out that this implies that the "highest" and "lowest" of the substance categories must extend indefinitely towards the more and less vital ends of the continuum respectively. This implication is developed for the lowest category in *Thoughts*, where it is called the *Adamah*, and whose creatures are "worms". I have noted that it is not until after his involvement in *Thoughts* that Leibniz writes explicitly of three categories of monads, and uses descriptions of the lowest realm as containing "endless worlds in motes of dust" and as a "confluence of worms". This suggests that Leibniz's involvement in *Thoughts* led to a clarification of his ideas on

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<sup>151</sup> FoL, p. 51.



the categorization of created substances, and an adoption of some of the Helmontian nomenclature.

Finally, this comparative work has shown that Leibniz's criticism that the three worlds of the kabbalists cannot be literally separate, also applies to his categories of monads: that they are not different in kind but only in degree. This means that human rational souls are not essentially different from the souls of beasts and leaves open the possibility that they could even have evolved from them. Leibniz's evasive treatment of this issue suggests that he appreciated these unorthodox possibilities.

## Chapter 6 The Creation of the Cosmos

### 6.1 The Meaning of "Creation"

I have set out Leibniz's conception of the ultimate nature of existence, both of the world and of God; but cosmology is also concerned with the nature of the origin of the world. Leibniz discusses this origin in terms of "creation"; but before setting out the details of this process, it is necessary that it is first established as to what exactly Leibniz means by the term "creation": What are the various notions involved in this idea? I have already argued that Leibniz's metaphysics is a transcendental rationalism. Essences are concepts, ideas or perceptions, and as such presuppose minds, which they depend on for their existence, and to which they are said to belong. In the same way, properties presuppose, depend upon, and belong to, substances. It makes no sense to speak of perceptions as having independent existence, as being or signifying anything, if they have no subject or mind of which they are the predicates or ideas. Now, I have argued that in Leibniz's metaphysics "existence" itself is a mere idea, a predicate that is additionally attributed to a subject, when the proposition to which it belongs can be demonstrated to be a true one. The subject of such a true proposition is said to "exist" and is called a "substance". The truth of a subject, thus its reality or existence as a substance, has been demonstrated when the sufficient reason has been found that shows that the properties the subject has, must be as they are and cannot, rationally, be otherwise. When that sufficient reason is included in the concept of a subject, then its truth is self-evident: it necessarily exists, or is a necessary substance. The only idea of this sort is the idea of God; and this is the ontological argument. But when the concept of a subject has its sufficient reason located in another, then its truth

depends on the truth or reality of the other, and its existence is said to be "contingent". It will soon be seen that it is the mechanism of supplying a sufficient reason to a contingent substance, by a necessary substance, that is at the heart of the notion of creation for Leibniz.

Now, if what is called the world of things is to be regarded as nothing other than a set of properties or modes of a single substance, the (divine) necessary one, then it makes no sense to speak of real transformations or real initiations or a "creation" of the world. Indeed, there would then be no real difference between the world and God: "pantheism" and "creation" are mutually exclusive terms. The meaning of "creation" for Leibniz is essentially that notion which is contrary to that of "pantheism". That is, whereas "pantheism" treats of only one existing substance, of which all the things of the world are merely modes (this is Spinozism), "creation" presupposes a dichotomy between, on the one hand, a single substance and, on the other, a multiplicity of substances, which constitute the things of the world, conceived not as modes but as independently existing beings, and which are somehow produced from that one single substance: "The production of modifications has never been called *creation*, and it is an abuse of terms to scare the world thus." <sup>1</sup>

Creation, in the Leibnizian analysis, must be understood as the instantiation of (a plurality of) substances (and which constitute what is called the created world). But this instantiation, as with the whole of Leibniz's cosmology, takes place within a reality as it is conceived in his transcendental rationalism. That is, creative instantiation must *not* be conceived as a *temporal* process, as if there had once been only a single existing substance, and at a later point in time there arose in addition a multiplicity of substances. Rather, it must be conceived in terms of the *ontological*

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<sup>1</sup> H, section 395.



ordering of nature according to transcendental rationalism. In this conception, creative instantiation is the supplying of a sufficient reason for the existence of worldly substances. This presupposes that the substances of the world stand in need of a sufficient reason, or are non-necessary or contingent (and they are, "since there is an infinity of possible universes" <sup>2</sup>).

For Leibniz, God is a necessary substance or being who is the sufficient reason for his own existence, and who is also the sufficient reason for the existence of contingent or worldly substances. Thus, it is the entailment of the truth of being, or the emanation of existence within the ideal rational schema, and not a temporal succession, that is meant by creative instantiation. And since substances of this (actual) world precisely are contingent, or in need of instantiation by sufficient reason, they must be (mere) *possible* substances in the anterior stage of the logico-ontological order. Leibniz describes these "possibles" as possible *thoughts*. But this is not allegorical because it is axiomatic in transcendental rationalism that all things are thoughts, and instantiation into existence is merely the thought of a possible being (in God's mind) being made into the thought of an actual being, or, the thought of the subject of a possibly true proposition being made into the thought of the subject of an actually true proposition (a thought which is a "substance"). Substances therefore existed prior to their creation (as the thoughts of the subjects of possibly true propositions).

Emanative creation is thus not that of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. One is therefore perplexed by several statements Leibniz makes to the effect that the world

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<sup>2</sup> *Monadology*, section 53, in AG, p. 220.

of substances is created "out of nothing". For example, in the *Theodicy* of 1710, Leibniz says: "God produces substances from nothing".<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me that Leibniz says substances are created out of nothing simply to stress the point that the essence of "creation" is precisely that of inception, beginning, origination: of that which was not an independent substance, or not the thought of the subject of a true actual proposition, in the immediately prior step in the ontological order of things. Creation is, rather, out of a (prior) *substantial* and *actual* nothingness. Such *initiation* of the newly *substantial* and *actual* is necessarily contrary to the mere modification of the enduring (creator) substance, which would be "creation out of something" (Spinozism). It is certainly not the case that monads are spatial fragments of God's substance, since the Leibnizian concept of substance, the monad and God as supreme monad, does not include that of spatial extension:

One may not say that the soul could have been emanated from the substance of God in such a way as to grant parts to God; therefore the soul can only be produced from nothing.<sup>4</sup>

Now, the thoughts of possible substances can only be the thoughts of God. "God's mind" is the totality of all such thoughts of possible substances and their combinations. And since these combinations add up to an infinity of possible universes, this mental world of God is beyond the comprehensibility of merely finite minds: the pre-creation, pre-instantiation, stage is beyond the horizon of human knowledge. Thus, there is a further sense in which creation can be conceived as an emergence out of nothing, though Leibniz does not use specifically the expression "*creatio ex nihilo*" for this. Since creation involves the production of an infinite

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<sup>3</sup> H, section 395. See also, letter to Bourguet, 1709, in GP, iii, 544: "The origin of things out of nothing [is] through the power of the highest unity or God."

<sup>4</sup> RC, p. 74.

number of concepts, each of which combine to produce an infinite number of worlds, all of which must be compared to ascertain the best one, the process cannot, nor could it ever be, comprehended by a human being, or any finite mind. The details of creation are beyond our knowledge: what is created emerges out of the *nothingness of unknowability*. As Leibniz says:

A truth is above reason when our mind (or even every created mind) cannot comprehend it. Such is, as it seems to me, the Holy Trinity; such are the miracles reserved for God alone, as for instance Creation; such is the choice of the order of the universe, which depends upon universal harmony, and upon the clear knowledge of an infinity of things at once.<sup>5</sup>

### *Comparison*

Though the meaning of "creation" in Christian Lurianic kabbalism is discussed in less philosophical language than Leibniz uses, for example, in terms of necessity, contingency or sufficient reasons, it is fundamentally the same as the philosopher's. "Creation", for them, most certainly involves the production of separately existing substances by a necessary substance (an "infinite efficient"), "whereby a separable Being is constituted, or made".<sup>6</sup> This non-pantheistic production of substances, like Leibnizian creation, is a process to be understood "in the order of Nature, though not in the order of Time".<sup>7</sup> That is, in terms of the logico-ontological dependence of transcendental rationalism, which I have argued Christian Lurianic cosmology is also

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<sup>5</sup> H, Preliminary Dissertation, section 23. See also RB, section 443: "All monads were created by God and depend on him; yet we cannot understand in detail *how* this was done."; and H, section 249: "The Creation, the Incarnation and some other actions of God exceed all the power of creatures and are truly miracles, or indeed Mysteries."

<sup>6</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



based on. Van Helmont uses the terms "subsistence" and "self-subsistence" where Leibniz uses "contingent" and "necessary", thus "creatures neither are, nor can subsist of themselves" by definition, leaving God or the creator to be that only self-subsisting or necessary substance, which itself stands in no need of a sufficient reason for its existence. Leibniz makes it clear that the contingency of this world of substances, which distinguishes it from the necessary substance, and thereby provides his concept of creation, presupposes, in the ontological order, a plurality of other possible universes. The kabbalists never raise this issue, but pass straight on to state that anterior to their creation, substances existed as ideas in God's mind. Although this legitimately follows from their Platonic rationalism, without the distinction of cosmic substances into possible ones and actual ones, there can be no role for God's will as the supplying of a sufficient reason for this one actual universe; indeed there can be no creation at all, since creation is understood here as precisely that transition in the ontological order from that of possibility to actuality. However, as I shall mention below, the assertion by Conway that God's mind is prior to his will, implies the choosing of an action from a plurality of "possible" ones which exist in his mind. Von Rosenroth mentions the doctrine of the light ray or cosmic measure of the kabbalists, which I will suggest below represents the determining of one actual world from a myriad of possibles.

Creation, for the Christian Lurianic kabbalists, is the emanative instantiation of ideas pre-existent in the mind of God. Worldly substances are not made *out of* the substance of God (which is pantheism), but *by* the substance of God; nor are they created out of nothing, an illogicality "according to the Laws of the Essential

Description of Causes".<sup>8</sup> Leibniz adds these words to *Thoughts on Genesis*, which accord with both his own ideas and those of van Helmont:

True, indeed, is it, that neither Chaos nor Atoms, nor any other material principle, was co-eternal with God, out of which the world was made; but withal it is false that the world in a proper sense was made out of nothing as out of a subject matter, since it is a proposition of eternal truth that *nothing is made out of nothing*.<sup>9</sup>

In the same place, however, he also writes that "*creation out of nothing*... may be allowed of in a good sense". I have discussed the "good senses" which can be given to *creatio ex nihilo* in Leibniz's doctrine, namely, creation as the instantiation of worldly substance from the "nothingness" of an ideal, non-actual pre-existence; and from the "nothingness" of epistemological incomprehensibility. The Christian Lurianic kabbalists never seek to give such "good senses" to the phrase in question, though they do follow from their conception of creation as instantiation, since it is the same as that of Leibniz's. As for creation out of the incomprehensible, I have pointed out that *Ayin*, epistemological nothingness, was an aspect of the infinite godhead in Jewish Kabbalism, and also that Conway refers to the aspect of the *zimzum* in which God is separated from the world as the inaccessibly incomprehensible: a finite mind cannot embrace the infinite. Yet, not knowing does not mean not existing in transcendental rationalism. As Leibniz says: "A truth is above reason when our mind (or even every created mind) cannot comprehend it. Such is, as it seems to me, the Holy Trinity."<sup>10</sup> Since God and the emanative process of creation are such

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> H, Preliminary Dissertation, section 23.

incomprehensibles, the world arises, as it were, through a veil of nothingness, and is what Leibniz calls a miracle or mystery.<sup>11</sup>

## 6.2 The Creative Event

Leibniz believed that God and the world are essentially different, and that the latter was created. This can only mean that the world is the result of a transformation of reality, i.e. a change of the substantial status of pre-creation existence. Primeval reality changed from being one that included only a single substance to one including other substances; and since change presupposes an agent, the single necessary and eternal substance must be this agent: the only shift of reality conceivable, therefore, must be the introduction of more substances from and by the original substance. Now, when reality is considered in terms of only the *one* substance, then any and all of the infinite predicates that can be made of existence, must be made of, must belong to, this one subject. Hence, God has infinite attributes or infinite perception. At this stage, with only the one subject for all infinite attributes, reality is not substantially differentiated: God is the one undifferentiated substance, and his mind is the substantially undifferentiated "realm" of all ideas. And this one subject, as the one and only perceiver in existence, consequently knows all, and sees all, and this with a ubiquitous viewpoint.

*The creative process "begins" when God starts thinking: "When God calculates and exercises his thought, the world is made."*<sup>12</sup> That is, out of the ideas that exist in his mind, God forms propositions:

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<sup>11</sup> See H, section 249.

<sup>12</sup> *Leibnitii Opera Philosophica*, ed. by J.E. Erdmann, 2 vols (Berlin, 1840), i, 77.



Things are not produced by the mere combination of forms in God, but along with a subject also. The subject itself, or God, together with his ubiquity, gives the immeasurable, and this immeasurable combined with other subjects, brings it about that all possible modes, or things, follow in it. The various results of forms, combined with a subject, brings it about that particulars result.<sup>13</sup>

Now, God is reality conceived as having but one subject: consequently his substance is unlimited, or infinite, in the sense of being without ends or bounds. When God thinks he produces a *plurality* of (new) subjects: and reality with a plurality of subjects is a reality that is limited or finite. And the number of finite propositions that can be formed out of undifferentiated substance is infinite, i.e. their production can proceed without end, since however many are aggregated, or how much any or all of them are extended in space, it will always be possible to continue the process, for there cannot come a point at which the infinite source substance is exhausted: no point at which the multiplicity of new substances, taken together, pass from being an aggregate of limited substances into one substance that is unlimited. This idea of the infinite as that which is unlimited, undifferentiated, is referred to by Leibniz as the "positive infinite"; and though this can proceed into differentiation, as when God thinks, the reverse process of the differentiated becoming the *undifferentiated*, is forbidden.

We may say that there is no space, time, nor number which is infinite, but that it is only true that however great may be a space, a time, or a number, there is always another greater than it without end; and that thus the true infinite is not found in a whole composed of parts. It is none the less, however, found elsewhere; namely, in the *absolute*, which is without parts, and which has influence over compound things, because they result from the limitation of the absolute. The *positive infinite*, then, being nothing else than the absolute, it may be said that there is in this sense a positive idea of the infinite, and that it

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<sup>13</sup> PK, section 523.

is anterior to that of the finite.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore when God thinks he forms propositions which are spatial limitations of his one unlimited substance: an order relation called space then pertains between these plural propositions. And as these relations can change, so there is also a temporal ordering: a temporal limitation of God's unlimited or eternal substance. Therefore, if God is going to think at all, i.e. if the perceptions in the infinite mind are to be formed into propositions, then he must think an infinity of such propositions. And such an infinity of propositions is what we call a universe. Simply, God is undifferentiated reality, or one infinite substance; world is differentiated reality, or an infinity of finite substances, or a plenum.

Now, the truth of a particular proposition depends on its being logically compatible with all the other propositions that are thought of by God, and which together constitute a universe. If  $A=B$  is a true proposition,  $A\neq B$  cannot, by the principle of contradiction, also be true in the same universe. But since all the propositions God calculates are necessarily deduced of the eternal truths, and since his mind is omniscient, he knows when a universe of propositions is logically self-consistent, and so knows whether each of its particular propositions is true and therefore a real substance. Or rather, such a proposition is true and a substance *if* the universe within which its truth is determined, is itself a true one. For there is not just one universe of propositions that can be derived of the infinite ideas in God's mind, but rather an infinity of such internally consistent sets of propositions. Since there can only be one universe (by the principle of contradiction), unless a sufficient reason can be given as

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<sup>14</sup> *On Locke's Essay on Human Understanding*, in *New Essays*, trans. By A. Langley (Illinois: Open Court, 1949), pp. 16-17.

to why only *one* of these and none of the others can follow from necessary being, then truth, thus actuality, cannot be conferred on any one possible universe at all.

Now, since there is an infinity of possible universes in God's ideas, and since only one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God's choice, a reason which determines him towards one thing rather than another.<sup>15</sup>

Now, this sufficient reason cannot be exclusively grounded in the eternal truths, since it is these themselves that have generated the very multiplicity of universes, for which a sufficient reason is sought for bestowing truth on but one of them. And yet, if a sufficient reason is to be that very demonstration of truth, its indubitability must and can only be derived of necessary being. Thus, what is sought as sufficient reason is a non-logical essence of God. According to Leibniz this is "goodness"; and since God is an infinite being, if he has the attribute of goodness, he must have it to an infinite degree. What "goodness" might exactly mean in relation to the cosmical substance that Leibniz has defined as God, is problematical to say the least, and a protracted investigation of this issue is outside the scope of the present work.<sup>16</sup> It must be noted, however, that if goodness is a non-logical essence, its truth cannot be proved on rational principles by Leibniz's own definition of what constitutes such a demonstration. It would seem that faith alone is what provides for God's goodness; but then it has already been seen that if a sufficient reason is to exist to provide truth to one and only one of the infinite possible universes, this sufficient reason cannot itself be grounded on rational principles, since it is these very rational principles and

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<sup>15</sup> *Monadology*, section 53, in AG, p. 220.

<sup>16</sup> See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936) for an account of the historical precedents of attributing goodness to the source of the world.



their application to the eternal truths, which generated the multiplicity of possible universes in the first instance.

With all the possible universes before his mind, God isolates the one which displays his goodness the most. It seems that the greatest gift that goodness can give is existence; and the maximum existence or perfection is the gift of maximum goodness. Thus the universe that encompasses the maximum existence, specifically the maximum possible variety of being, coupled with the maximum possible order amongst those beings, is the best universe, the one which most displays God's goodness. God's thinking begins with the production of possible universes based on the eternal truths, and ends with the determination of the one true universe according to the principle of the best. This determination is his "*will*".

And this reason can only be found in *fitness*, or in the degree of perfection that these worlds contain, each possible world having the right to claim existence in proportion to the perfection it contains.

And this is the cause of the existence of the best, which wisdom makes known to God, which his goodness makes him choose, and which his power makes him produce.<sup>17</sup>

In the sense that the truth of the eternal ideas is independent of God, that the propositions and possible universes produced of them follow "automatically" from the principles of reason, Leibniz states metaphorically that,

There is a struggle between all the possibles, all of them laying claim to existence, and that those which, being united, provide most reality, most perfection, most significance carry the day. It is true that all this struggle can only be ideal, that is to say, it can only be a conflict of reasons in the most perfect understanding.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Monadology*, sections 54-55, in AG, p. 220.

<sup>18</sup> H, section 201.

That the possible universes "sort themselves out", that God does not determine the truth of the ideas which generate them, means God's will is not primary to his understanding. Rather, he first calculates in his mind all possible universes according to the eternal truths "given" him, *then* he applies his will: he produces something according to a truth not given him, but located in him, i.e. his goodness.

Now, Leibniz defines a free action as one which is not *logically* necessitated. Since the reason for God's will, his goodness, is not a logical reason, his will is therefore not determined, or, it is free. The reason of goodness

incline[s] without necessitating... God fails not to choose the best, but he is not constrained so to do: nay, more, there is no necessity in the object of God's choice, for another sequence of things is equally [logically] possible. For that very reason the choice is free and independent of necessity, because it is made between several possibles, and the will is determined only by the preponderating goodness of the object.<sup>19</sup>

If Leibniz has untied the Gordian knot of contingency and freedom he has done so on the strength of his definition that to will freely is to act according to a principle which is an essence of the agent and which is not itself constrained by logic: even though it may be constrained by its essence. The point of immediate interest now is that if one universe is to be "selected" from many logically possible ones, then it is so by means of a sufficient reason (wherever that reason be grounded, or however constraining on the selector it may be).

Leibniz's metaphysics asserts that reality, existence, is conferred when truth is demonstrated, when a sufficient reason is discovered. The sufficient reason for the world is therefore what produces the existence of the world, i.e. is its creator; and this is God, whose essence of goodness provides the sufficient reason for the selecting or

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., section 45.

the willing of one world from amongst the possibles. It has been seen that the transmission of truth and reality by way of the ordering of reasons is the process known as emanation, where an active principle is the cause or reason for a corollary passive principle. And the force of logic inherent in this transmission of truth and being, is called "power" by Leibniz. A being is a sufficient reason, an active principle, for some other thing, has a will, when it has power behind it: when its own existence is demonstrated by the force of logic. Hence a would-be agent that lacks power, a reason for its own being, cannot exercise a will, or provide a sufficient reason for the being of another. In the case of God, whose existence is necessary, his power is infinite.

It is the *power* of this substance [God] that renders its will efficacious. Power relates to *being*, wisdom or understanding to *truth*, and will to *good*. And this intelligent cause ought to be infinite in all ways, and absolutely perfect in *power*, in *wisdom* and in *goodness*, since it relates to all that which is possible.<sup>20</sup>

Since the creation of the universe is the supplying of a sufficient reason to one of the possible universes, the world is created by the emanation of God's power:

The primitive essence of all substance consists in *power*; it is this force in God which causes God to exist of necessity and everything which is to emanate from him. Next comes the *light* or wisdom, which comprehends all possible ideas and all the eternal truths. The last component is *love* or the will, which chooses among the possibles that which is best, and that is the origin of contingent truth or the actual world.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., section 7.

<sup>21</sup> To Morell, 1698, in Gr, i, 139. See also *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 14, in AG, pp. 46-47: "Created substances depend upon God, who preserves them and who even produces them continually by a kind of emanation, just as we produce our thoughts..."

From [God] all individuals emanate continually."; and see *Discussion with G. Wagner*, in Gr, i, 396: "This series of actual possibilities, or the world, emanates out of God... by the certain and determined reason of the greater good."



Emanative creation is a reversal of the rational process. In this latter, God is *epistemologically posterior* to the world, last in the order of discovery, for we begin with the knowledge that (some sort of) world exists, from which, because other universes are logically possible, we infer that this world is contingent, therefore in need of a sufficient reason, which is located in a being whose existence is necessary, or is its own sufficient reason, i.e. God. But with the necessary being established, God becomes *ontologically anterior* to the world, first in the order of being, who is the sufficient reason for this contingent world by bestowing the truth of a full-demonstration grounded in the eternal truths, and who thus bestows reality on the world, or is the creator of the world: "The sovereign substance, from which everything emanates...is the cause of existence and order, and in a word the last reason of things." <sup>22</sup>

### *Comparison*

In the kabbalistical scheme of creation the imagery is primary and the philosophical concepts have to be extracted. I have shown that in the *Kabbala Denudata*, the *Adumbratio* and the *Principles*, the Lurianic doctrine of the *zimzum* was adopted by the Christian Lurianic kabbalists. This doctrine should be philosophically interpreted as the transition in the ontological order (though it is nearly always expressed temporally) from that of the divine substance as undifferentiated to that of the same as being differentiated, i.e. from existence as substance devoid of any spatio-temporal division (as an infinite and eternal oneness) to existence as the same one substance, but now subject to spatio-temporal division (as one universal substance with an

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<sup>22</sup> To Bayle, 1702, in GP, iii, 72. The emanative creation process is discussed by Mercer, pp. 230-242; Tymieniecka, pp. 123-131; and OH, I, 147-170.

infinity of modes). It seems to me that the *tehiru*, or space within God produced by the *zimzum*, stands for the container in which the modes or thoughts of God are located. Because these thoughts (as yet) are not substances in their own right, but mere modes of the only (divine) substance, the *tehiru* is still filled only with the ("residue" (or *reshimu*) of the) divine substance.

That "God had all things essentially in him before the Creation... by having the Ideas... of all things in him", <sup>23</sup> and that the *reshimu* existed prior to the exercise of God's will ("Then the light was let into the *space*... And that light is the Emanative Principle" <sup>24</sup> ) is why I have suggested that the *reshimu* equates to the thoughts of God prior to creation. I have remarked that the Christian Lurianic kabbalists failed to distinguish between possibles and actuals, though I argued that such a distinction is implicit if the concepts of will and creation are to mean anything at all. But a distinction in the creative process is referred to in the *Adumbratio* <sup>25</sup> and in the above quotation from the *Kabbala Denudata*, viz. that of a *reshimu* that exists prior to God's will acting on it, and which I suggest may be equated to the thoughts in God's mind prior to the exercise of his will, i.e. the thoughts of all possible universes. Certainly, it is a fact in Conway that a *possible* action of God is limited only to that "which does not imply a contradiction"; <sup>26</sup> thus, like Leibniz, possible universes exist ideally in God's mind as possible tenders for actual universes to be created, as long as they are logically self-consistent. What God *actually* does, which of the possible universes he actually creates, is, according to Conway, finally determined by his goodness, <sup>27</sup> the same ultimate creative sufficient reason that Leibniz asserts. Moreover, since this

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<sup>23</sup> *The Divine Being*, section 15.

<sup>24</sup> *Kabbala Denudata*, 1, 1, 146.

<sup>25</sup> Chapter 4, section 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Principles*, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13, 16.

determining of God's will is by his goodness, which is grounded in an essence of his *own* being, Conway writes that "the will of God is most free", because, like Leibniz, she defines a will to be free, not when it is undetermined (that is blind action), but when it acts "without any external force or compulsion".<sup>28</sup> That this conception of God's will and his freedom coincides with that of Leibniz's, is shown conclusively in his remarks on the *Seder Olam*. Here, van Helmont writes that:

There is no indifference of will in [God]... he is a necessary Agent, and yet also the most free Agent.

Therefore he did necessarily create... and that not by constraint from any foreign Agent, but from the Determination of his internal Goodness and Wisdom.<sup>29</sup>

Commenting on this, Leibniz writes:

The author [van Helmont] starts in a way of speaking, which is somewhat shocking, because he says God is a necessary agent... We can give a good sense to it and that with some simple charity. Because in fact God is always determined to make the most perfect. And this does not contradict liberty. For true liberty consists in the perfect usage of the faculties.<sup>30</sup>

### 6.3 The Creation of the Plenum and of Creatures

Leibniz's account of creation is almost entirely focussed on the issues of grounding the contingent (this universe) in the necessary (God). With this established, he has little else to say on the subject, and one must fill in some of the details oneself, such

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Sections 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> A, 1, xi, 20.



as the role of monads in the production of creatures and matter, by looking towards his fundamental analysis of the created world. Prior to its instantiation as an actual corporeal substance, a created being is a possible thought in the mind of God: that is, it is the idea of a possible true proposition, the subject of which corresponds to the unextended soul or single dominant monad of the corporeal substance, and the predicates to the extended body or collection of monads subordinated to the soul. As parts of the extended body of the corporeal substance all have their own souls, or governing principles, so the set of predicates of a proposition in God's mind has subsets, each of which has its own subject or complete concept. Because space, be it that of the extended body of a created corporeal substance or that of the predicate set of propositions in God's mind, is infinitely divisible and infinitely augmentable, so the monads of the created world each subordinate or govern an infinity of monads "below" them, and are each themselves subordinated or governed by an infinity of monads "above" them. Likewise, the complete concepts in the mind of God each emanate or imply, in the logical order of reason, an infinity of concepts "below" them, and are each themselves emanated or implied by an infinity of concepts "above" them. Hence, this created world of corporeal substances is founded on a plenum of monads, and a possible world of propositions in God's mind is founded on a plenum of concepts. Since this actual world, anterior to its creation, has an exact counterpart as a possible world (amongst an infinity of others) in God's mind, it is clear that the corporeal substances of this world, and the plenum of monads out of which they are formed, differ in no way from those propositions in God's mind, and the plenum of concepts out of which they are formed, except that created corporeal substances are posterior to the application of God's will, whilst mere propositions or possible substances are anterior: that is, corporeal substances are contingents

underwritten by a sufficient reason (the reason of the goodness of the necessary substance determining this best actual world), whereas mere propositions remain in undetermined contingency.

### *Comparison*

The Christian kabbalists had famously identified *Adam Kadmon* to Christ, and in *Thoughts on Genesis* van Helmont definitely equates it both to Christ and to "Elohim": "Elohim corresponds to Adam: Adam Kadmon... Elohim is the Messiah".<sup>31</sup> But when Leibniz edits the draft, "Adam Kadmon" is omitted entirely. This may be for consistency, for the edition is kept mostly free of overtly kabbalistic terms; but, as will become apparent below, Leibniz was averse to what he conceived this *Adam Kadmon* to be.

A precise explication of the nature of *Adam Kadmon* in philosophical terms is difficult to extract. By interpolating between the Christian Lurianic kabbalists' account of creation and the metaphysical nature of the world, I have interpreted *Adam Kadmon* to be *both on the one hand* the infinity of active spirit principles and the creatures which are formed out of these, what corresponds in Leibniz to the plenum of monads and corporeal substances; *and on the other hand* to be that counterpart of this world as it exists in the mind of God, a divine counterpart which also exists in the Leibnizian metaphysics. *Adam Kadmon*, the Messiah, *Elohim*, as the spirit plenum of the created world is rightly conceived in the kabbalistic doctrine *both* as the medium through which creatures are made, since a creature is a relation formed between and

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<sup>31</sup> OH, I, 84; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35.

of spirit principles; *and* as the overall container in which all creatures have their being, since *Adam Kadmon* is the infinitely extended plenum of spirits: "All things were created through him and in him".<sup>32</sup> And out of an unbounded plenum of spirit substances, it necessarily follows that an infinity of creatures must be created. This accords exactly with Leibniz's cosmology, as is shown by his remarks on paragraphs 4 to 6 of the *Seder Olam*:

God's operations are never limited to a finite number of substances. It is ridiculous in effect to close the universe into a sphere, full of a definite number of little moving things, or atoms.<sup>33</sup>

To the notes taken down from van Helmont for *Thoughts on Genesis*, Leibniz adds his own words on *Elohim* (*Adam Kadmon*), using "seeds" for "spirit principles":

We understand that Aelohim is the Creator, who by His most exalted infinitely diffused, vital, vegetant, and generating virtue, conceived all things from eternal seeds hidden in Himself, and at length produced and sent forth the same out of Himself into multiplicity and distinction.<sup>34</sup>

The "vital, vegetant, and generating virtue" means the principle of activity as manifested in inter-substantial relations: what van Helmont refers to as the fiery principle, and what in Leibniz is the subordinating and governing power possessed by a single dominant soul monad. But the active principle of every seed or monad necessitates a passive principle: van Helmont's watery aspect of a creature: the extended body, or the Leibnizian collection of spirit-substances or monads subordinated to the soul.

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<sup>32</sup> *Adumbratio*, chapter 3, section 13.

<sup>33</sup> A, 1, xi, 20-21.

<sup>34</sup> p. 15.



As well as being the infinity of substances of the plenum of the created world, *Adam Kadmon* is also the uninstantiated counterpart of this world: the thoughts in God of this universe as a possible one yet to be actualized. This Janus nature is mentioned by van Helmont in the draft notes to *Thoughts. Adam Kadmon, or Elohim*, "eminently encloses in himself all substances under him and he is the glorious spiritual universe".<sup>35</sup> But this succinct expression is not carried over by Leibniz into the published edition.

In the *Principles* Conway writes that Christ has a dual aspect, both as "God... or the essential word of the father", and as "the word which is uttered and revealed, the perfect and substantial image of God's word".<sup>36</sup> As word or thought in God's mind, Christ or *Adam Kadmon* belongs to the substance of God; as uttered thought, he is substance *separate from* God. In other words, the plenum and the universe of things constituted from it, exists both as a thought of the single divine substance, and as a multiplicity of substances in their own right. This distinction is clear in *Thoughts on Genesis* where Leibniz writes that:

The things which were produced by Aelohim out of seeds, whereas before they were in Him, now subsist by themselves and are left to themselves, being endued with an active and spontaneous power.<sup>37</sup>

And this transition is effected by the "uttering", or the discharging of power, into the thought of a thing:

Now as he that speaks, gives forth a vital Force or Power, which is received by the Hearers; so likewise, *Aelohim*, by his inward Speech, or efficacious

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<sup>35</sup> OH, I, 84; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 35: "in se eminenter omnes sub ipso substantias estque universum spirituale gloriosum."

<sup>36</sup> *Principles*, p. 21

<sup>37</sup> p. 12.

Thought, sent forth Vertue from himself, into the Object; which, although, whilst it was yet with him, it were *Aelohim*; yet as soon as it was made his object, it began to have a particular or proper Being of its own.<sup>38</sup>

I should note that Leibniz's uncertainties concerning his conception of the *Adam Kadmon* (*Aelohim*), in particular its ontological relations to God and creature, show themselves here. The pre-uttered thought of an object is a predicate of the divine substance, and therefore "*in* him". In Leibniz's manuscript version of the work, he does indeed write this;<sup>39</sup> but, as the quotation above shows, he changes this in the published version to "*with* him", which, at least in contrast to "*in*", implies that the pre-uttered object is not substantially identical to God. And yet, as I now pass on to show, the transition referred to by the uttering of thoughts of objects, actually parallels the creative transition in Leibniz's own cosmology.

In the discussion of verse 4 of chapter 1 of Genesis "And God saw the light, that *it* was good...", the notes taken down from van Helmont state that the light (the divine "Force or Power tending to Order"<sup>40</sup>) was not only seen by God to be good, but also as something which had left him and therefore become a separate new creature:

When he saw the light that it was good, he saw that it had gone out from himself... Now that which had gone out from himself was separated or more distinct from him, namely, was a new creature.<sup>41</sup>

This corresponds to the emanative creation process being dealt with here; but it is to the nature of God's seeing, his perception, and the question as to whether the light went out from God before he saw it, that is of particular interest to me now. For

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 49r: "... quod licet adhuc in ipso Aelohim esset...".

<sup>40</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p.33.

<sup>41</sup> OH, I, 90; LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36: "Dum vidit lucem quod bona esset, vidit quod ex ipso exierat... Quod autem exierat eo ipso erat ab eo separatum vel potius distinctum nempe nova creatura."

Leibniz, in his version of the discussion of verse 4 introduces the philosophical distinction between knowledge *a priori* and *a posteriori*, the former of which is God's type of knowledge. Leibniz criticizes the usual understanding of verse 4 "as if *Aelohim* having first created the Light, afterward, as it were by Experience, saw it was Good".<sup>42</sup> Experience, or *a posteriori* knowledge, is that type of knowledge of objects that finite minds are restricted to, whereas the infinite mind knows objects *a priori*. Moreover, if God's actions are not to be blind, he must know before hand (*a priori*) how they will turn out: thus knowledge by experience would at best be superfluous for God. Thus Leibniz notes that the *a posteriori*

way of seeing the Goodness of things, is unworthy of God, when it becomes to see things *a priori* (in their Causes) yea, it is very unworthy of a Wise man, to do first, and then consider whether it be well done.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, the very nature of perception of the omniscient mind is sight by *a priori* knowledge. Since the truth of objects of the created world depends on their being members of the best world, it is necessary if God is to see them, that he knows *a priori* which of the possible worlds is best. Consequently, when God's sight, or his *a priori* knowledge, extends from merely seeing possible universes, by also considering (*a priori*) which will be the best, and extends to seeing this actual universe, then this also is creation, or the provision of the predicate of existence to a contingent set of thoughts of things. The following sentence which Leibniz added to *Thoughts on Genesis*, encapsulates the idealistic rationalism of his theory of creation: "Wherefore in Truth, whilst he saw it [the light], he made it; or in seeing that it was Good, he willed it, and in that he willed it, he made it."<sup>44</sup> God's seeing (*a priori*) that a possible

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<sup>42</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.



universe is the best one is, in fact, what God's will turns out to be. And there is no difference between this seeing (of the best universe) and its being made. Thus this world exists both as an *a priori* vision in God, as "essential word", as objects made outward or separate from God by the discharging of power into his thoughts of them; and as "revealed word", as multiplicity of substances with their own proper being or active powers. Real objects of this actual world result from the *a priori* vision of God (including *a priori* knowledge of the best): "as the Corporeal Sight hath, or supposeth an outward Object, so the divine Vision makes an outward Object."<sup>45</sup> And because the substances or monads of the revealed word were, in the anterior order of nature (before their creation), of the essential word, that is, were ideas in a divine vision, an *a priori* apprehension available only to the infinite mind, so the production of these substances, from the point of view of the perception of finite minds -outward or *a posteriori* perception- has all the qualities of the *epistemological creatio ex nihilo* I have already referred to. As Leibniz writes:

It will be more proper to say with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap ii, verse 3, that *visibles were made of invisibles*; that is, that the seeds of this corporeal world lay hid after an ideal and spiritual manner in the superior world of Aelohim Himself, which at last were hatched and produced to outward perception.<sup>46</sup>

This superior world of the hidden essential word in *Adam Kadmon*, is the kabbalistic world of *Azilut*. The three lower worlds of *Beri'ah*, *Yezirah* and *Assiyah* belong to the revealed word in *Adam Kadmon*, and, as I have already discussed, each refers to a tripartite division of the continuum of creatures composed of the monads or "seeds of this corporeal world".

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

## 6.4 The Origin of Matter

The bodily component of a corporeal substance is what Leibniz calls matter, and this equation remains always. Despite the fact that corporeal substances higher up the continuum, more active than human beings, may have bodies too subtle for our senses, e.g. the bodies of angels, they nevertheless have bodies. For Leibniz's definition of a living being, a corporeal substance, comprises a single dominant monad as soul, and a collection of monads subordinate to it, and which is its body or matter. Consequently, matter is created at the same stage in the ontological order as are corporeal substances and the monadic plenum in general. There is no evidence in Leibniz that matter, at least that which appears so to us, only arose when corporeal substances at some higher position, slipped down the continuum.

All things are active and possess Entelechies, spirits and souls only by virtue of the participation of... the same originative spirit (God), which gives them all their perfections. And matter itself is only a production of this same primary cause. Thus everything emanates from it as from a central point.<sup>47</sup>

In terms of Leibniz's three-fold categorization of monads, and from the point of view of human beings, the substances which form the collection, which appear to our senses as bodies, must be assigned to the category of bare monads. But the limits of human sensation do not determine what body or matter is, and nor do they restrict it to a specific stratum of the continuum. Rather, matter or body, as the passive aspect of a corporeal substance, exists *everywhere* on the continuum.

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<sup>47</sup> RC, p. 88

## *Comparison*

Lurianic Kabbalah does not identify matter with body, but with a specific part of the continuum, within which spirit principles possess a vitality of a critically lower degree than those of the "non-material" beings above. The production of material bodies is always explained as being the result of a slip down the continuum of vitality by those previously non-material spirits. Van Helmont follows this line in those works of his which deal with this issue, but, as I have indicated above, that the material world is not absolutely devoid of life, which it could not be since it exists on an open-ended continuum of vitality, implies that even here, matter must be a relative attribute: presumably that which is commonly ascribed to those collections of spirit substances which appear as bodies to our human sense.

But whatever the ultimate nature of matter might be for the kabbalists, they definitely assert that it is the result of a cosmic event: that of the Fall. Since, however, for Leibniz, matter is identical to body, and not a particular stratum of bodily vitality, there can be no post-creation event responsible for its production. However, it is possible that the bodies of corporeal substances could become more dense so that a previously subtle body came to have the appearance of a visible body, as the result of some event which sent that creature down the continuum.

I have set out the causes and effects of the Fall, based on the account given in *Thoughts on Genesis*. Creatures are microcosms of governance and knowledge, originally all created in a universal harmony, as that instantiated replica of the cosmos of all things as it existed in the mind of God, or in the *Azilutic* realm of *Adam Kadmon*. As a result of the freedom that creatures had, some of them developed an



excessive self-governance and own-knowledge, essentially making a radical break from the macrocosmic order. This results, according to words added by Leibniz to *Thoughts on Genesis*, in a moral microcosm, in which the creature develops its own principles of right action, which is:

levell'd at some imaginary private good of the ruler [a created soul], wherein the Fall of *Adam* did consist, who being deceived by *Eve* and the serpent, thought it a rapine or robbery to rule and govern things like God. <sup>48</sup>

And such a privatizing of morality is that radical break,

which happened, when *Adam* taking to himself the property of an individual, became a schismatick, by rendring himself from the primitive unity, and made to himself an object to work upon, within himself. <sup>49</sup>

Such creatures which "row against the flow", to use van Helmont's analogy, eventually end up being swept down the continuum because they have made themselves incongruous to it, making their place in the order of vitality untenable. Their bodies, or spheres of governance, take on a less vital, more dense appearance, when they fall. Leibniz duly represents this aspect of the Fall in his edition of *Thoughts*, e.g. "All things, before the Fall, were more heavenly and transparent than earthly and opaque". <sup>50</sup> This fall down the vital continuum by a creature manifests not only as an increase in the density of its body, but also as an increase in the confusion of the perceptions of its soul. Before the Fall, the perceptions of all creatures flowed out of their souls precisely as God had pre-established them in that universal ordering of ideas as it existed in his mind, and to which the pre-lapsarian world of creatures

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<sup>48</sup> pp. 93-94.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

and their perceptions was a perfect replica. Since these perceptions are emanated in the logical order of nature, ultimately grounded or sourced in God, they are true perceptions. The draft notes for *Thoughts on Genesis* refer to a pre-lapsarian perception, which was mental or ideal; but Leibniz adds the notion that this mental sight was a universal one:

Man before the Fall had all things within himself, and with a mental or intellectual glance of his mind pierc'd through them all, he had a total or universal sight, by which he penetrated to the inmost of things... In *Adam* they were all true ideas, and such as contained the spiritual things themselves.<sup>51</sup>

This universal vision cannot be the same as that of God: only an infinite being knows all things; and man, before the Fall, was still a finite mind. It seems that what Leibniz is referring to here is that since the perception of each creature is as it is by virtue of its place in the pre-established harmony of all things, each perception mirrors the entire universe, and so is universal in that sense, but the details of which are confused. Leibniz speaks of this immanence of God's omniscience in his own words, for example: "It seems to me that every mind is omniscient in a confused way."<sup>52</sup> With the excessive self-governance and own-knowledge that led to the Fall, a creature's perceptions no longer wholly and passively emanate from its soul according to the logical order of the pre-established harmony. This radical separation of itself from the universal order is the creature no longer perceiving itself and all other things as one (one harmonious cosmos) but seeing other things as "outside" itself; and the dislocation of its perception from the *a priori* emanative vision results in the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 146-47.

<sup>52</sup> PK, section 524.

epistemological fall down the continuum into the confusion or "outer darkness" of a *posteriori* vision. As Leibniz writes:

But by the Fall, being turn'd out from the truth of things, tho' by having his eyes opened, he might seem to awake, yet so, as that whereas before his eyes beheld the inward light, they were now open to outer darkness. This is the reason why, since the Fall, all things appear to man, as if they were outward; for that he affecting his own propriety, that is, to be something of and by himself, is stept out of the band of universality.<sup>53</sup>

### *Summary*

To summarize the various issues surrounding creation. It has been noted that certain general principles regarding the meaning of "creation" are shared by Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists. Both assert that "creation" cannot mean pantheism but must mean that creatures are separate substances to God's substance: separate not by a temporal unfolding but by an unfolding of the logico-ontological steps of a transcendental rationalist conception of the cosmos. Leibniz distinguishes the existential status of creator and creature by the logico-ontological distinction of the necessary and the contingent; the Christian Lurianic kabbalists by the self-subsistent and the subsistent. The contingency of creatures depends on there being (logically) more than one possible universe in God's mind: a point always made explicit by Leibniz, but left merely implicit by the kabbalists. For Leibniz, this emanative conception of creation is not that of *creatio ex nihilo* insofar as creatures or "thoughts actual" pre-existed as "thoughts possible" in God's mind; yet *creatio ex nihilo* may have a "good sense" insofar as creatures pre-existed in the nothingness of possibility

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<sup>53</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p. 147.



and incomprehensibility. This is paralleled in the kabbalistic imagery of the *zimzum*: an attempt to portray both a separation of the world from God and, at the same time, a retention of something of him in the world.

The creative "event" itself presupposes that God's mind is prior to his will. This view is shared by Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists, as is their understanding that God's action is free: both agree that free will is not undetermined or blind action, but is an action which is ultimately determined by the agent itself and not another being. "Prior" to his act of creation, there was only the one divine substance with his mind and his infinite thoughts of all possible universes. This finds a symbolic correlate in the kabbalistic *tehiru* and its *reshimu*; and in *Thoughts on Genesis*, Leibniz makes use of van Helmont's interpretation of the first words of *Genesis* "In the head God created". The specific "act" of creation for Leibniz is the invocation of the sufficient reason for this one universe: the bridge between the necessary and the contingent in the logico-ontological order of transcendental rationalism: Leibniz's creative will of God. In kabbalistic imagery this event is represented by the light of *Ein-Sof* entering the *reshimu* as cosmic measure and emanative principle.

This particular cosmogonical process implies that the created actual cosmic plenum of monads (spirit substances) and the corporeal substances (creatures) formed of them has an exact counterpart in a possible cosmic plenum which exists as an (infinite) set of propositions in God's mind. This finds a metaphorical illustration in the kabbalistic conception of *Adam Kadmon* and its syncretism with Christ: he is both the created world and its divine counterpart in God's mind. Conway describes Christ's having a dual aspect: as the uttered substantial image of God's word, he is the created world; and as the divine essential unuttered word, he is the same thing but as (uncreated)

thought of the world in God's mind. In the draft to *Thoughts on Genesis* a parallel is made between the actual created world and the divine light which (since the creation) is now external to God and is essentially a separate, distinct and new thing. In criticizing this metaphor Leibniz draws attention to God's mode of knowing: it is *a priori*: the light does not have to "go out" before God can see it and thereby know it *a posteriori*. Cosmological processes are to be understood within transcendental rationalism: it is God's knowing (*a priori*) what is the best world that precisely is the actualizing of one world. The actual world is a plenum of substances separate to the divine one by virtue of the distinction of the contingent and the necessary. But that the actual world also exists as a possible world in the mind of God means that there is an idealistic counterpart to it in the way that the metaphors of the Christian Lurianic kabbalists make clear. The dual nature of monads as both divine and mundane will be further clarified in the next chapter.

Finally, it has been shown that Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists both assert that nature is a vitalistic continuum. This implies that matter, as the passive aspect of a creature, is coeternal with monads, and therefore could not be generated subsequently. Leibniz is consistent in his account of the origin of matter, but the Christian Lurianic kabbalists contradict themselves by adopting the Lurianic doctrine of the breaking of the vessels.

## Chapter 7 The Strata of Being

### 7.1 Interaction amongst the Strata of Being

It is appropriate that I now make explicit the relationship of God to the world of created monads. The nature of this relationship coincides with Leibniz's "fundamental meditations [which] revolve on two things, to know about unity and infinity." <sup>1</sup>

These two terms express numerically the most essential distinction between God and the world. God is reality conceived under one substance: it is reality *undifferentiated*, or infinite. The world is reality conceived under a plurality of substances: it is reality differentiated into finite parts. A monad is the substance of such a finite part. And since the summation of parts can proceed without end, never reaching an aggregate of which a further addition cannot be made, so there is said to be an infinity or uncountable number of parts, or, there is a plenum of monads. Leibniz uses the word "infinity" here to describe the plurality of monads of the world to mean "endlessly countable", rather than as "a very large concrete number".

Infinity, that is to say, the accumulation of an infinite number of substances, is, properly speaking, not a whole any more than the infinite number itself, whereof one cannot say whether it is even or uneven. <sup>2</sup>

Parts of reality are destined always to remain parts: they do not, by numerical augmentation, grow to a point at which they dissolve into being one whole: parts cannot transcend from being that of reality differentiated into that of reality undifferentiated. The monad, as the substance of a piece of space and time, or as the

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<sup>1</sup> To Sophie, 4 November 1696, in GP, vii, 542.

<sup>2</sup> H, section 195.



active principle of a body of monads, might extend itself across space and time, becoming the sufficient reason for ever greater parts of reality, by subsuming more and more monads; but because of the infinite (never-ending) number of monads available, a point at which further extension is no longer possible, at which all reality is encompassed, cannot be reached. Hence no monad of the world, no finite part, could ever become the one substance of reality: a monad could never become equal to God, "for God could not give the creature all without making of it a God." <sup>3</sup> An ontological chasm separates, on the one hand, God as reality undifferentiated, as one substance, united, unlimited, infinite or perfect, with all possible attributes; and, on the other hand, world as reality differentiated, as infinitely many substances (monads), actually separated, limited, finite or imperfect. Here lies the fundamental distinction between God and creature. The monad is "infinitely less than a God", is "a diminished divinity". <sup>4</sup> Thus it is that God is transcendent not only to the particular monad but also to the infinite collection of them. God is not the aggregate of all things (that is what is called the world); nor is he the prime matter out of which bodies are constituted (bodies are collections of monads); and nor is he the substance out of which monads are apportionings (monads are not parts of God, but, as unities themselves, are created substances):

and to which it must return as One should not imagine... that the soul is a portion which is detached from Him a drop of water to the ocean. Such would render God divisible, whereas in fact the soul is an immediate production of God. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., section 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Double Infinité Chez Pascal et Monade*, in Gr, ii, 553-55.

<sup>5</sup> RC, p. 73.

Insofar as God's relationship to the monads he creates is a transcendental one, Leibniz makes worldly substances external to God: "When God resolved to act *outside* himself...".<sup>6</sup> But there is another aspect to the God-monad relationship: that based on similarity. Conceptual connections between the two make what is called the immanence of God, and which expressions like "All is one" and "One is all", seek to illustrate:

The saying *that all is one* should be counterposed with another, *that the one is all*... All things are one, but not formally as if they comprised one, or as if this *great One* was their matter.<sup>7</sup>

Insofar as the existence of each and every monad, being nothing but an "actualized" thought of God, depends on God, so he is said to be omnipresent or immanent in all things, and they are said to be located in him: "*In God there are infinite, really diverse substances*".<sup>8</sup>

If God is transcendent numerically and spatially to monads by virtue of his being a unity that subsumes an infinity of substances, then a similar relationship holds between monad and body, for it has been seen that, because of the infinite divisibility of space, the number of monads contained in a body will be infinite. Thus a dominant monad subsumes an infinity of other monads. And in the same way as the world is ontologically separate from God, because it is a multiplicity of substances, whereas God is but *one* united substance, so the body itself is ontologically separate from its dominant monad. Thus Leibniz says of each monad that it is "at the same time

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<sup>6</sup> H, section 204.

<sup>7</sup> RC, p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> L, p. 118. See also, A, 6, I, 123: "God is the one among everything".

infinitely less than a God, and incomparably more than a universe of matter", as well as being "a diminutive divinity" it is "a material universe eminently".<sup>9</sup>

Now, a monad cannot attain absolute perfection in the sense of becoming a substance that subsumes all others since subsumption is an unending process towards the ever larger, conceived either spatially or numerically. Conversely, no monad can be reduced to absolute *imperfection* or to a substance that subsumes no other, because subsumption is also an unending process towards the ever smaller. Consequently, all monads exist on a continuum which extends in one way infinitely towards smaller and smaller numbers, spaces and imperfection; and in the other way infinitely towards larger and larger numbers, spaces and perfection.

I am not joking, but clearly admit, that there are animals in the world as much larger than ours are, as ours are larger than those tiny animals of the microscopists, for nature knows no boundary.<sup>10</sup>

Though there is no absolutely imperfect substance (no prime matter), there is an absolutely perfect one: God. And if the world is developing towards perfection then its increase must describe a hyperbolic curve as it approaches absolute perfection, for such is not finally reachable by created substance.

Having made explicit the numerical-spatial distinction between God and monad it is now possible to understand how perceptions or properties, and appetitions or forces, differ between God and monad, as Leibniz describes them. Because God is existence conceived under only one subject, any and all attributes that can be made of existence, necessarily pertain to this one substance. Thus Leibniz says that God's

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<sup>9</sup> *Double Infinité*; Gr, ii. 553-55.

<sup>10</sup> To Bernoulli, 18 November 1698, in AG, p. 169. See also H, section 19: "Our globe... [is] incomparably less than a physical point... since the proportion of that part of the universe which we know is almost lost in nothingness compared with that which is unknown."



attributes are infinite, or are perfections (unlimited attributes). All qualities (that there can be) are concentrated in him; or, his perception is omniscient. Because monads are the subjects of true propositions in God's mind, their attributes are said to be derived from God's, since, prior to creation, there was only one substance (God's) to which all attributes could belong: "Whatever is of perfection in things, necessarily flows immediately from that highest fount [God]".<sup>11</sup> And because plurality necessitates the finitude of the entities concerned, these monads are limited expressions of the attributes or perfections of God. As each of these monads is a complete concept or thought in God's mind, so each is a limited perception of God from a particular point of view. So when God thinks and creates,

a substance, which is of infinite extension insofar as it expresses everything, becomes limited in proportion to its more or less perfect manner of expression.<sup>12</sup>

The degree of clarity of expression or perception of a particular monad depends on the extent to which it subsumes other monads; and this clarity increases when a monad subsumes more and more other monads. But it has been seen above that this process proceeds *ad infinitum*; therefore there cannot be a (worldly) monad whose perception is maximally clear and distinct (for there will always be more monads available for it to embrace). Where there are partial perceptions so will there ever be: aggregates of the limited cannot become an unlimited whole. Thus the monad's perception will always be infinitely less than God's; or, God's perception is transcendent to the monad's: "If [a monad] had only distinct thoughts it would be a

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<sup>11</sup> To Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf, 31 December 1692, in Gr, i, 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 15, in AG, p. 48.

God, its wisdom would be without bounds".<sup>13</sup> Yet, if the degree of perception or expression of attributes marks out the transcendental distinction of God and monad, that the monad's perception *is* a perception of God (albeit a finite one), or, its attributes *are* the (limited) attributes of God, emphasizes the similarity of the two types of being, i.e. the immanence of God in things. Thus:

All things are one... That is [God] attends to them intimately and fully, and expresses Himself in the perfections which He communicates to them according to their degree of receptivity. And it is thus that one says *Jovis omnia plena*; that He fills all, that He is in all things and that also all things are in Him.<sup>14</sup>

But though what a monad clearly expresses, or perceives consciously, is only finite, there is a sense in which the infinity of God's attributes or perception is immanent in each monad. Because the expression or perception of each monad is what it is by virtue of the determination of its complete concept, a process which involves the presence to God's mind of all possible concepts in all possible relations, every monad is said to contain a vestige of this omniscience:

In God the universe itself is not only concentrated, but it is also perfectly expressed, but in each monad he creates, there is only one part distinctly expressed, which is more or less big according as the soul is more or less excellent, and all the rest, which is infinite, is only expressed confusedly in it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> H, section 124.

<sup>14</sup> RC, pp. 89-90. See also *On the True Theologia Mystica*, in L, p. 367: "The divine perfections are concealed in all things".

<sup>15</sup> *Extrait du Dictionnaire de M. Bayle article Rorarius p. 2599 sqq. de l'Edition de l'an 1702 avec mes remarques*, in GP, iv, 553. See also Pk, section 524: "It seems to me that every mind is omniscient in a confused way"; and *On the True Theologia Mystica*, in L, p. 368: "Within our self-being there lies an infinity, a footprint or reflection of the omniscience and omnipresence of God".

Conscious perception or clear expression of attributes emanates out of the complete concept of a monad. What is unconscious in perception, or confused in expression of attribute, is what is implicit in the original formulation of the concept in God's mind, viz. its relations to all other possible concepts. Objectively, clear conscious perceptions or expressions concern those relationships between a monad and all the other monads in its collective body which it subordinates. Those perceptions or expressions founded on the relationships between the monad and those monads beyond its collective body, are what are called confused unconscious perceptions or expressions: what Leibniz calls *petites perceptions*. And these relations extend *ad infinitum* throughout the plenum, becoming increasingly more distant and weak, more unconscious and confused; but nevertheless they exist. All is connected to everything else. Since monads are the worldly correlate of the concepts determined upon by God, thus it is that the subordinating relations between monads correlate with the inclusion of concepts within each other in God's mind.

Now, the clarity of perception/expression of a monad increases as its collective body of subordinated monads increases; or, as its complete concept implies more other concepts. It has been seen that this process has no end: God's perception is transcendental to worldly perception. Conversely, a monad's clarity decreases, or its confusion increases, when the body of monads it subsumes, or is the dominant monad of, decreases. But this decrease also is without end: never will a monad be found that does not itself yet subsume further monads, that does not have at least some degree of perception/expression. Consequently, there is no zero clarity or infinite confusion. And "matter", conceived as the multiplicity of monads infinitely available for subsumption, implies that a monad's perception will always be infinitely greater than "matter", or be transcendent to it. A monad is,



apperceiving everything confusedly, whereas God knows everything distinctly; [a monad] knows something distinctly, whereas the material universe does not feel and does not know anything at all... [A monad is] imitating God and imitated by the universe with respect to its distinct thoughts, similar to God by its distinct thoughts, similar to matter by its confused thoughts.<sup>16</sup>

The beatific vision seems, accordingly, to be conceived by Leibniz as that equation of perception of a finite being to that of the godhead: to the seeing of all things distinctly. Leibniz says that there

will only be moral assurance until somebody discovers the *a priori* origin of the world we see... For having done that, he will have demonstrated that what appears to us is a reality... This would nearly approach the beatific vision.<sup>17</sup>

But since the transcendence of God to the finite mind is an unbridgeable gulf, so it is that

that supreme felicity (with whatever *beatific vision* or knowledge of God it may be accompanied) can never be complete, because, since God is infinite, he can never be entirely known.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, I turn to the relationship between God and monad as it concerns emanative force. God is the explanation of existence reduced to a single subject, to one ultimate sufficient reason. As such, all changes to this existence, specifically the emergence of new substances, are termed effects, of which the cause is attributed to the only already present substance it can be: the one and only substance of God. Hence, as cause of everything, his emanative force, activity or will is infinite: he is omnipotent.

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<sup>16</sup> *Double Infinité*, in Gr, ii, 553-55.

<sup>17</sup> To Simon Foucher, 1675, in AG, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Principles of Nature and Grace*, section 18, in AG, p. 213.

The monads of the world, on the other hand, as the sufficient reasons for a mere *part* of reality, have a force of emanation, or appetite, which is finite. Since there is an infinity of monads, Leibniz tells us that this emanative force is "everywhere implanted by the Author of nature".<sup>19</sup> The active force or appetite that a monad is imbued with depends on the extent to which it is the sufficient reason for the properties of other monads which it subsumes. And though this force or appetite increases the more a monad is the sufficient reason for other monads, by subsuming more of them, as has been seen, the subsumption of monads can proceed without end, thus there cannot be a monad with maximum active force or appetite, such that it is the sufficient reason for all other monads. Finite forces cannot become infinite; and the monad's will or appetite will always be infinitely less than God's, or, God's will transcends the monad's. Nevertheless, the monad's appetite is emanative power, that same type of power that is the nature of God's will, on which it depends as its own sufficient reason, and of which it is the continuation, albeit in finite magnitude. Inasmuch as God is the sufficient reason for the existence and sustenance of the monad, and the ultimate sufficient reason for the properties/perceptions the monad has, God (his emanative force) is said to be immanent in the monad; or:

God is everything by eminence, as the perfections of effects are in their cause... All things are one by emanation, because they are the immediate effects of Him.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Specimen Dynamicum*, in L, p. 435.

<sup>20</sup> RC, p. 89.

Though a monad can never attain perfection or unlimitedness, the extent to which it approaches this is a measure of its approach to God, and indeed of the immanence of God in the monad, or its union with him. For example:

One sees clearly that all other substances depend on God, in the same way as thoughts emanate from our substance, that God is all in all, and that he is intimately united with all creatures, in proportion to their perfection.<sup>21</sup>

When God created the world, out of all the possible combinations of concepts in his mind, he determined upon one set according to the sufficient reason of his goodness (hence the selection of the best). Now this sufficient reason, by virtue of its bestowing truth, is what actualizes concepts into substances: it is the will of God emanating substances. This process is described imagistically by Leibniz: God is "the primitive centre from whom all the rest [monads] emanate".<sup>22</sup> But when he describes the immanence of God in each monad, he says: "We speak of God as being a sphere or a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."<sup>23</sup>

Force is active in a monad when it concerns the subsumption of other monads: and it is passive insofar as a monad is itself subsumed by another. But, as has been seen in the case of perception, there is no monad which exists only in a subordinate relation: thus there is no monad which is not yet the sufficient reason for some others: there can be no monad with zero active power, or infinite passive power, i.e. there is no primary matter. Matter conceived as the infinity of monads always available for subsumption, implies that a monad's appetite is always infinitely greater or transcendent to this *general notion* of matter. On the other hand, inasmuch as the

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<sup>21</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 32, in AG, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Extrait du Dictionnaire de M. Bayle article Rorarius p. 2599 sqq. de l'Édition de l'an 1702 avec mes remarques*, in GP, iv, 553.

<sup>23</sup> RC, p. 66.



monad's appetite is the sufficient reason for its perception, for the properties of its body (of monads), it is said to be immanent in its body.

Now, all monads partake of both active and passive power. In the sense that they subsume other monads, are the sufficient reasons for their own perceptions, i.e. possess appetite, so they are said to partake of perfection or being, or have something of the divine immanent in them, since the ultimate source of perfection lies in God. As far as monads are subsumed, they are mere effects, or have some lack of will, and instead are said to partake of imperfection or non-being.

All creatures derive from God and from nothingness. Their self-being is of God, their non-being is of nothing. (Numbers too show this in a wonderful way, and the essences of things are like numbers.)

No creature can be without non-being; otherwise it would be God. <sup>24</sup>

The use of numbers here, refers to Leibniz's binary analogy for the relationship between God and monad. Binary numbers illustrate the presence of perfection or being (God, 1) and imperfection or non-being (0) in a corporeal substance. As a string of 1s and 0s, a creature contains something of divine immanence, perfection and being, and something of imperfection or non-being. On the other hand, representing corporeal substances as denary numbers, as summations of 1s (i.e. the integers >1), gives the misleading analogy that they are constituted of God (1), as if he were the matter of the world.

When I thought out my binary arithmetic... I judged that in that lay hidden the most beautiful ideas of the creation, or the origin of things out of nothing, through the power of the highest unity or God. And it must be considered that the expression of numbers in binary reckoning arise out of unity and nothing; not through working up, as when I say 1+1 is 2, and 1+1+1 is 3, and so on in turn, as in the same way, by comparing God with unity and creatures with

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<sup>24</sup> *On the True Theologia Mystica*, in L, p. 368.

numbers, God becomes the matter of creatures; but through a certain or lesser influx of perception.<sup>25</sup>

George MacDonald Ross discusses the significance for Leibniz of binary numbers in creation theory, especially in relation to some sketches Leibniz made for a medallion. He notes that between these sketches an ambiguity is revealed as to whether or not 0 is to represent unformed matter or the void. I have argued that there can be no unformed or prime matter in Leibniz's cosmology: it is indistinguishable from pure negativity or the void, an equivalence which Ross has noted is to be expected from a philosopher in the neo-Platonic tradition.<sup>26</sup>

The nature of the immanence of one thing in another is dealt with more precisely in Leibniz's discussion of hypostatical union. Two things are hypostatically united when the one is the *immediate* sufficient reason, cause or active principle of the other, which is its instrument, effect or passive principle. This is because the terms sufficient reason and instrument, or cause and effect, or active and passive, are all terms which are mutually dependent on each other: there can be no meaning to the concept "active" unless it is accompanied by that of "passive; and vice-versa. These pairs of terms are inextricable, so any two things which stand in an active-passive relation to each other, are hypostatically united.<sup>27</sup>

Now, God is the active principle or immediate sufficient reason for the existence of monads (by virtue of his selecting (actualizing) complete concepts). He is thus hypostatically united to each monad; and it has already been seen that the dependence of each monad on God's will for its existence, is regarded by Leibniz as an immanence of God in the monad. But the transcendental distinction between God and

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<sup>25</sup> To Bourguet, 1709, in GP, iii, 544.

<sup>26</sup> See Ross, "Leibniz and the Origin of Things".

<sup>27</sup> Leibniz discusses hypostatical union at length in his essay entitled *On the Incarnation of God or on Hypostatical Union*, of 1669-70; A, 6, i, 533.

monad, of the infinite and the finite, avoids an equation of the two substances and averts pantheism.

Within the created world itself, we discover another type of hypostatical union, this one involving that of mind and body. Because the dominant monad, or mind, in a corporeal substance is the active principle or immediate sufficient reason for the properties of its body (the collection of monads subordinate to it), considered as passive principle or instrument of the mind, so the mind is hypostatically united to, or immanent in, its body. Thus, when mind acts it moves body; and when God acts he creates minds: "Mind does not act on body by creating, but by moving; God creates".<sup>28</sup> As God is not the *immediate* sufficient reason for the properties of body, but only the *ultimate* sufficient reason behind the pre-established harmony of all created substances, he is not hypostatically united to body. God is the sufficient reason for the existence of minds (he creates them); but mind is the sufficient reason for the properties of body (it moves them).

Now, because monads do not exist by metaphysical necessity but rather by the will or action of God, the continued existence of them, no less than their creation, depends on the continuation of his action. And since the (direct) action of God is, and only is, a creative one, this continuous action is sometimes called continuous creation by Leibniz. In the 1686 *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz writes: "It is very evident that created substances depend upon God, who preserves them and who even produces them continually by a kind of emanation".<sup>29</sup> In a letter to Bayle, circa 1698-1701, he says that it is from substance as actualized complete concept,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 14, in AG, p. 46.



of which the phenomena are born through order, which it received at first and which has been conserved for it by the author of things, from which all realities or perfection always emanate in a manner of continuous creation.<sup>30</sup>

Because creation is the inception of the new (out of the nothingness of not previously existing), Leibniz uses the image of the flash. And since the world exists in a temporal continuum, there being an infinity of instants between any two points of time, the continuous act of creation by God manifests as an infinity of acts or flashes. Hence Leibniz writes:

One can conclude also that the duration of things, or the multitude of momentary states, is a mass of an infinity of flashes of the divinity, of whom everything at each instant is a creation, or reproduction of all things... from one state to the next.<sup>31</sup>

God's will continuously acts in order to keep the universe of monads in existence, or, the sufficient reason for an enduring world is in an enduring cause or substance. Similarly, if monads are to be the sufficient reasons that explain the properties of worldly bodies, then they too must be substances or enduring causes; for if they cease to exist as active principles, the causal basis of things could be reverted back only to the active principle of God, which would be a return to occasionalism and pantheism.

From this it again follows that the doctrine of occasional causes defended by several persons can lead to dangerous consequences... Since that which does not act, which lacks active force, which is robbed of discriminability, robbed finally of all reason and basis for existing, can in no way be a substance.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> GP, iii, 58.

<sup>31</sup> To Sophie, 31 October 1705; GP, vii, 564-65. See also, *Monadology*, section 47, in AG, p. 219: "All created or derivative monads are products, and are generated, so to speak, by continual fulgurations of the divinity from moment to moment."

<sup>32</sup> *On Nature Itself*, section 15, in AG, pp. 165-66.

Occasionalism and pantheism are avoided because monads are (enduring) substances that consequently exercise power. When a power appears not to be acting, when a mind seems not to be moving a body, this has to be seen as only the result of the action or motion being *indiscernible*. It has been seen that this power is the logical force of emanation in the order of reason, in which properties or perceptions flow out of the substance or complete concept. Leibniz gives the analogies of the law of the series and calculus. As the mathematical formula generates a series of terms or a curve describing a trajectory, so the complete concept emanates a series of properties or motion through space.

Grant me therefore in the primitive tendencies [the dominant monad's appetite] what it is necessary to recognise in the derivative [properties or perceptions of the body of subordinated monads]. The case is like that of mathematical laws of series, or the nature of curves, where the entire progression is sufficiently contained in the beginning.<sup>33</sup>

### *Comparison*

In Leibniz's cosmology there are three strata: that of God, the plenum of monads, and the universe of corporeal substances. In this section I intend to show that these are essentially the same as the three strata identified by the Christian Lurianic kabbalists: God, the *Adam Kadmon*, and creatures; and that the philosophical relations between these are fundamentally the same, including the problematical middle stratum.

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<sup>33</sup> To de Volder, 10 November 1703, in L, p. 533.

I have explained the ways in which God is related to monads, a relationship which includes both conceptual similarities and conceptual differences: and these find expression in the theosophical terms of immanence and transcendence. Similarity is centred on the idea of hypostatical union, or the causal inextricability of two substances. In Leibniz the substantiality of monads causally and inextricably depends on the substance of God (for they are ideas in his mind (ideas made "actual"), and a mind of ideas needs a real perceiving subject). Because of this Leibniz says that God is immanent or omnipresent to each and every monad. Inasmuch as the particular perceptions that a monad has are the result of God's own thinking, indeed his omniscient consideration of all possible universes of things, so in each being there is an immanence or "a footprint or reflection of the omniscience and omnipresence of God".<sup>34</sup> And this applies also to the will of God, which, as the sufficient reason as to why each and every monad has been created, is the original of that emanative force, which has its particular manifestation in the appetite of the monad.

But if there is a sense in which each monad partakes of the substance, perception and will of God, there is, on the other hand, a sense in which each monad is distinguished from the divinity by the unbridgeable absolute divide of the infinite and the finite. Hence, the substance of God, as the one and only subject of existence undifferentiated, is infinite; whereas the substance of a monad, though the effect of God's own substance, is to be absolutely distinguished by magnitude as finite: for it is the subject of a (differentiated) part of existence.

In *Elucidarius Cabbalisticus*, which Leibniz read sometime between 1706 and 1710, he notes Spinoza's words that "Everything is in God and moves in God".

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<sup>34</sup> *On the True Theologia Mystica*, in L, p. 368.



Leibniz agrees with this, superficially, insofar as it expresses God's immanence in monads. But he goes on to qualify this with the transcendental distinction:

I think that everything is in God, not as the part in the whole, nor as an accident in a subject, but as place, yet a place spiritual or enduring, and *not* a place measured or framed... It is thus that all things are in him.<sup>35</sup>

The continuous nature of space, that the addition of parts, finitudes, has no end, implies that subjects of finitudes can never become equal to God. So though God "fills all", he is also to be fundamentally distinguished from creature: "It can be said that the difference between God and man is only one of more or less, though the ratio is infinite."<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, the perception of God is infinite: he sees all things distinctly; but the perception of the monad is always finite: for existing on a continuum of clarity-confusion, there is always some minimum indistinctness in its perception, for "if it had only distinct thoughts it would be a God, its wisdom would be without bounds".<sup>37</sup> And, the will of God, being determined by no other being but his own (his essence of goodness), is unlimited or infinite; whereas the monad's will, as true emanated force in a complete concept determined by God's will, is, therefore, a limited or finite one: every monad's will exists on a continuum of activity-passivity, always with some minimum passivity or limitation.

I have shown how the immanence of God in created spirit substances is applied by the kabbalists, using their analysis of the relationship between God and spirit as that of hypostatical union, as that inextricability of a cause and its effect. As Leibniz had described this connection as the omnipresence of God in all things, as his being "all in

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<sup>35</sup> B, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Dialogue between Poliander and Theophile*, in L, p. 218.

<sup>37</sup> H, section 124.

all", so van Helmont and Conway write in the *Cabbalistical Dialogue* that "the Creator produced first of all *infinite Myriads of Spirits* united to him, and with him... so that *God* might be *all in all*".<sup>38</sup> In *De Homine*, Leibniz notes that according to van Helmont "God contains all in one".<sup>39</sup> Leibniz continues, in words which sound more like his than van Helmont's:

There is nothing greater nor smaller than the One, in whom all things exist. Created things are examples of the infinite unity. (God is a maximum of infinity, and a minimum of indivisibility, or a unity or lack of mass).<sup>40</sup>

This immanence is that "intimate penetration" of the logical force of the order of nature, as it emanates from the active principle to the passive. Thus the "spirit of *Aelohim*", or that emanated force of God as it is conceived to be related to the plenum of spirit substances, or the "waters", according to Leibniz in *Thoughts on Genesis*, did not

only move the surface of the waters... but that it penetrated to the inmost parts of it; for all the faces in the waters, or Spirits hid in the water, received their activity and virtue from the Spirit of *Aelohim*.<sup>41</sup>

This omnipresent immanence of God is mentioned in the *Seder Olam*, where van Helmont writes that "God is so present in all things, that he is everywhere centrally existent".<sup>42</sup> But Leibniz criticizes this description stating that "it will be difficult to give a reasonable meaning for these words. God has no centre".<sup>43</sup> Yet, if God is to be

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<sup>38</sup> p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Section 9, in Gr, i, 96.

<sup>40</sup> Section 24, in OK, ii, 1059-60; LBr, 67, fols 52-53: "Nihil majus aut minus Uno in quo sunt omnia. Creata sunt exemplata Unitatis infintae (Deus infinitae maximus, indivisibilitate seu unitate seu molis carentia minimus)".

<sup>41</sup> p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Section 20.

<sup>43</sup> A, 1, xi, 19.

immanent in the created world at all, and Leibniz clearly thinks he is, then he must be in those finitudes of substance called monads. Since these monads are centres, and that they exist as a plenum, i.e. everywhere, van Helmont's phrase for God's immanence as "everywhere centrally existent" fits the Leibnizian cosmology excellently. It is interesting to note that in the late *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*, Leibniz writes: "We speak of God as being a sphere or a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere". <sup>44</sup>

I have highlighted another aspect of the infusion of *Adam Kadmon*/Christ by God: namely, as body is that which is hypostatically passive to the soul, its active principle, so there is a sense in which the *Adam Kadmon*/Christ, as hypostatically passive to God, might also be referred to as his body and his instrument or organ:

The fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in... Jesus Christ, according to the testimony of the Apostle *Paul*... Christ... is as it were a certain Body for the Divinity... God doth as it were corporally manifest himself to his Creatures by Christ. <sup>45</sup>

I had to highlight the reasons as to how this could follow from the implicit philosophy in the Helmontian cosmology: reasons which Leibniz complains are lacking in the work just quoted:

The sentiments of the author [van Helmont], that God is a pure spirit, himself corporified, so to say, in Jesus Christ, for all time... these are very nice ideas, which flatter the imagination, but he fails to support them on solid foundations. <sup>46</sup>

However, Leibniz is not rejecting the (albeit unsupported) analogy that is being made.

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<sup>44</sup> p. 66.

<sup>45</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 25.

<sup>46</sup> A, 1, xi, 19-20.



If the immanence of God to the created spirit substances is asserted by the Christian kabbalists, so also is the transcendence, or absolute difference, between them. These differences, which can be charted in terms of number or space, perception or wisdom, can be made explicit and seen to coincide with those in the Leibnizian cosmology. It is the attributes of infinity and finity which the Christian kabbalists, along with Leibniz, say absolutely distinguishes God from created substances: "God is always infinitely greater than all his creatures, so that nothing can be compared to him".<sup>47</sup> And this is because, also like Leibniz, at bottom, God is existence conceived as undifferentiated, i.e. as a single infinite substance; whereas a created spirit is existence differentiated, and which differentiation results in an infinity of finite substances: the plenum or *Adam Kadmon*:

Every *Spirit* is not the *Divine Essence*... in a numerical *Identity*... But that the *Divine Essence* can be divided... that we admit not... The *Divine Essence* itself is not *constringed* [limited], but... *created spirit* [is].<sup>48</sup>

In *De Homine* Leibniz had noted that "God transcends all things, is extended in all things and is over all things, gives to all things that which they have". It is not clear whether these words are van Helmont's, Leibniz's, or the latter paraphrasing the former. However, the following words in *De homine* are surely those of Leibniz:

As every number participates in unity, so also nothing which exists is free from the one. God is one, not by aggregation of the many, but by being most united and is the united font anterior to the multitude. The one is without multitude, but not the contrary.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Principles*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> Section 14, in OK, ii, 1057; LBR 67, fols 52-53: "Deus transcendit omnia, pertingit ad omnia et super omnia, dat omnibus quae habent"; "Ut omnis numerus unitatis est particeps, ita nihil existentium est expers unius. Deus est unum non collectione e pluribus sed unitissima et fontanali

I have argued that the Lurianic concept of the *zimzum* was adopted by the Christian Lurianic kabbalists to illustrate the fundamental separation of God and creature: the transcendence in which God "is said to exist outside the place of the world".<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the *zimzum* highlights the immanence of God in the created world, by virtue of the residue of God which is left in the space produced by the contraction, "as when fragrance is not completely taken away but is at least diminished as when a glass full of fragrant oil is emptied".<sup>51</sup>

But the world, according to the doctrines I am comparing, does not end with a plenum of separate spirit substances or monads: there is a third stratum of being: the extended bodies which are ontologically different to the unextended substances out of which they are formed. Now, the immanence of a soul in a body, like that of God in a soul, is that notion of the presence of a cause in its effect. Hence, a soul, as the substantial active principle for a body, is said to be immanent in it: not by mechanical causation, but in the emanative order of transcendental rationalism. This, in general, is explicated as the causal transmission from a cause (single unextended active principle) to an effect (multiple extended passive principle). It is to this that van Helmont is referring, when, in the *Seder Olam*, he writes of Christ's presence as being "extended by the essential Radiations from the Centre of his most Divine Soul into all Creatures".<sup>52</sup> But Leibniz rejects the assertion that real rays emanate from souls into other things:

It is easy to say that the soul of Jesus Christ is emanatively present through his rays... but it will be difficult to give a reasonable meaning for these words... The soul has no rays properly speaking.<sup>53</sup>

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unitate ante omnem multitudinem. Unum sine multitudine esse, sed non contra".

<sup>50</sup> *Principles*, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> *Kabbala Denudata*, 1, 2, 89.

<sup>52</sup> Section 20.

<sup>53</sup> A, 1, xi, 19.

But it is not at all clear that van Helmont intends by these "rays" anything more than analogy; and radiating light was a common simile for causal emanation. However, even as analogy, Leibniz goes on to criticize the notion that emanation involves the real presence of a cause in its effect:

A presence via rays is just a metonym, by a metonym comes an effect instead of a cause. Because the Sun, in the words of rigorous philosophy, is never present to us, anymore than the bow itself is in the place where the arrow is received.<sup>54</sup>

This is an essential rejection of the concept of immanence, which I have already shown to be present in Leibniz's cosmology. Indeed the *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* both asserts the immanence of the cause in the effect and describes this as an emanation:

All things are active... by virtue of the participation of the... same originative Spirit (God)... a production of this same primary cause... Everything emanates from it as from a central point.<sup>55</sup>

I.e. by an unextended active principle. Now, the monads in the bodily collection associated with a soul have what Leibniz calls their *petites perceptions* and insensible appetitions. In the sense that these, in the emanative order of nature, flow from the soul or complete concept which rules them, the perception and appetite of the soul is immanent in them. Since the Christian Lurianic analysis of soul and body accords with Leibniz's, the essences of perception and will of the soul are immanent in the body, i.e. in those countless spirit substances which comprise it. Hence the body,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> p. 88.



being inextricably united to its soul, is not utterly dead and stupid, but is infused by some degree of perception ("i.e. hath Life, Sense and Knowledge" <sup>56</sup>), and which "proceeds from its inner being" <sup>57</sup> or soul.

As for the transcendence that the soul has over the body, this equally follows in Leibniz and the Christian Lurianic kabbalists. Both doctrines assert that the soul is a single monad or spirit substance, and that the body is an infinity of the same. An unbridgeable numerical chasm exists between them; and the perception and appetition of the soul is always greater than the infinitesimal *petites perceptions* and appetitions of the monads of its body.

God is immanent in every monad of the plenum, in every spirit substance of the *Adam Kadmon* or Christ, in that each of these is a thought of God, and, as thought, belongs to the substance of the thinker. Hence, there is a divine aspect to the plenum. On the other hand, each monad is immanent in the body associated with it, in that it is the active principle for its body, or, is a substance in its own right, separate from God. The worldly aspect of the Messiah plenum, i.e. the plenum of active spirit substances, as opposed to the plenum of God's thoughts, is called "the Man Christ" by van Helmont; and since this is immanent in all creatures, he attributes omnipresence to this "Man" Christ. But this omnipresence of spirit substances in creatures, is of a lower order than that omnipresence of God in spirits: the "Attributes of omnipresence... of the Man Christ, are nevertheless inferiour to those which appertain unto God". <sup>58</sup> But Leibniz, not appreciating the precise cosmological role that Christ has here, can make no sense of plural omnipresences:

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<sup>56</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 30.

<sup>57</sup> *Principles*, p. 69.

<sup>58</sup> *Seder Olam*, section 19.

[That] the omnipresence of Jesus Christ is different to the omnipresence of the divine, in the way the author explains it, is like what the English call *non-sense*, a play on words without meaning.<sup>59</sup>

But it is the case that in the Leibnizian cosmology there are also the same two omnipresences: that of God in all monads, and that of each monad in its body. And although each part of the world, each body, does comprise an infinity of monads, to which a dominant soul monad is omnipresent, this omnipresence is nevertheless inferior to that of God's, which is an immanence in the entire world, in each and every one of the infinite monads of the plenum. Thus, in the monadic plenum, the divine realm of God and his thoughts is fused together with the worldly realm of souls and their bodies. It is in this sense that the Christian kabbalists speak of Christ, that plenum of spirit substances of *Adam Kadmon*, as partaking of both God and creature, that he "is the true and appropriate medium between the two."<sup>60</sup> Concerning this joint ownership of the soul of a creature, van Helmont says in the draft notes to *Thoughts on Genesis*, that "spirit is not properly ours, but the Lord's; yet the soul is properly ours through the working out of our body".<sup>61</sup>

In the *Seder Olam*, van Helmont had also written that:

Besides this world *Briah*, higher than which our Original doth not reach (if we have respect to the parts composing humane Nature) there is understood another World, more noble, and (in the Order of Nature), more antient than the rest, immediately flowing from the Author, God himself, called in Hebrew *Aziluth*, which signifies the Nearest to the most high and supreme God himself.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> A, 1, xi, 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Principles*, p. 60.

<sup>61</sup> LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36: "Spiritus non est nobis proprius, sed Domini; sed anima nobis propria est per elaborationem nostri corporis".

<sup>62</sup> Section 43.

I have interpreted the world of *Beri'ah* (along with *Yezirah* and *Asiyyah*) as that of the created spirit substances and the creatures formed of them; and the world of *Azilut*, I have interpreted as the same spirit substances insofar as they exist as ideal contingents in the mind of God. According to the doctrine, as I have explicated it, the *Adam Kadmon*, the Messiah, as the plenum of spirit substances, partakes of both God (spirits as God's thoughts: the world of *Azilut*) and creature (spirits as created souls: the lower worlds), and it is *in this sense* that the *Adam Kadmon* is a medium between God and the creatures. Indeed, the passage above continues, regarding *Azilut*, that it: "cannot agree to any other than Christ, the Saviour and Mediator between God and Men". In his critique of these words, Leibniz writes:

If by the world of *Azilut* the author understands the intelligible world which is in God's thoughts, one could allow it, but it must not be said that it holds a middle position between God and the creatures, since it belongs to God himself.<sup>63</sup>

Leibniz is conceiving the ascription "medium" not as that double aspect that spirits of the Messiah plenum have (as ideas of God *and* as the souls of creatures), but as a *third* ontological stratum *between* God and creatures. And yet the monads of Leibniz's own cosmology have precisely this double aspect, each partaking both of the divine and the corporeal: A monad is "a diminutive divinity" and "a material universe eminently"; is "imitating God and imitated by the universe"; is "similar to God by its distinct thoughts, similar to matter by its confused thoughts".<sup>64</sup>

However, by the time Leibniz comes to write up his edition of *Thoughts on Genesis*, he is at least clear now about van Helmont's conception of *Aelohim* or the

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<sup>63</sup> OK, ii, 1053; LH, I, V, 2d, fols 22-22r.

<sup>64</sup> Gr, ii, 553-55.



Christ plenum of monads, as he who both partakes of being "joyned" to God, and who contains the active principles of the created world:

With him [God] is joyned *Aelohim*... who hath relation to the ideas of things, and contains in himself, the treasure of vertues and powers, which by creation he brings forth in time. <sup>65</sup>

It is the case then, as Conway writes, that the "order of things... [is] three, namely, God as the highest, Christ as the mediator, and the creation as the lowest rank of all". <sup>66</sup> Van Helmont writes the same in the *Seder Olam*: "This *Ens Medium*, or middle Being between God and creatures, is Christ the Heavenly Adam". <sup>67</sup>

Commenting on this, Leibniz says:

Sometimes he [van Helmont] says he [the Messiah] is truly God, equal to the Father, and of the same nature; sometimes he makes him a medium between God and the creatures, which is an untenable expression. It is impossible that there is a medium between the absolute being and the limited being. <sup>68</sup>

I have already discussed the sense in which the "medium" of Christ should be conceived, and how Leibniz, at this time, has failed so to do. But Leibniz continues his remarks, drawing a distinction between God and creature in terms of infinity and finity, arguing that, since, mathematically, there is no medium between these two, there can therefore be no being between God and creature:

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<sup>65</sup> p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> *Principles*, p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Section 11.

<sup>68</sup> A, 1, xi, 21. Leibniz repeats this criticism in a letter to Loefflerus of 13 December 1694, in D, i, 19: "Here in outline or scholium should be rejected *Arianus*, who [says] Christ made the creatures, but as the principal one, through whom were created other creatures, of which opinion also the Author of a new book favours, entitled *Seder Olam*, who also wishes the Messiah to have existed from the beginning as a medium between God and the remaining creatures, so that through him everything was created".

If the author of the book knew mathematics, he would never say that the Messiah or the celestial Adam, is a middle being between God and creatures. One cannot know how to find a Middle being between the finite and the infinite, which is not either finite or infinite. And the mediating line proportional between the finite line and the infinite, must be that same infinite.

He further says that:

It is true that one can conceive of degrees of the infinite, that must be understood as inferior infinities; but what would happen is that there would then be many Messiahs, because the degrees of the inferior infinities are innumerable.<sup>69</sup>

Yet it is true that in Leibniz's own cosmology, such inferior infinities do exist: every monad, by virtue of its subsuming an infinity of other monads in its body, is such an inferior infinite. A monad is "at the same time infinitely less than a God, and incomparably more than a universe of matter."<sup>70</sup> Moreover, because each and every monad is positioned on a continuum, in which space has no maximum or minimum magnitude, there is an infinity of these inferior infinities.

The Messiah in Christian Kabbalah does not correspond to a greatest spirit substance (and such cannot exist in an unbounded universe, an endlessly augmentable continuum of monads), but it is that very conception of the monadic plenum itself. So when Leibniz adds that "the true philosophy never allows an inferior being to God, which is also superior to all other possible beings",<sup>71</sup> he does so on the basis of his own misconception of the cosmic Messiah. However, it is the case that in Leibniz's own cosmology, the monad is a being which lies between God and creatures: God is not identical to the created monad, which is an active principle for a *part* of existence; nor is a monad identical to a creature, which is a complex relation of monads. The

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<sup>69</sup> A, 1, xi, 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> Gr, ii, 553-55.

<sup>71</sup> A, 1, xi, 19.

"three orders of things" mentioned by Conway, viz. God, Christ, creation, correspond in Leibniz to God, monadic plenum, corporeal substances.

At the same time, it must be understood that neither the Christian kabbalists nor Leibniz, assert that there are three types of substance; and neither, by implication, are there two creative events. For the bodies of creatures, corporeal substances, are composed of the *relations* between spirit substances or monads, of which only the latter are truly created. Leibniz writes that a monad is

the only one which deserves being called (a Being), a substance after God, since multitude is nothing but a heap of several substances and not at all a Being, but Beings.<sup>72</sup>

The Christian Lurianic kabbalists quote John 1 verse 14 that the Messiah "is the *only born, who* (is produced) *of the Father*."<sup>73</sup>

Monads are created by God, who is the sufficient reason for their existence; but bodies are formed not by God but out of monads, and by the sufficient reason of a single ruling monad: "Mind does not act on body by creating but by moving; God creates."<sup>74</sup> In Christian Kabbalah, the Trinity is interpreted so that God is only present in creatures *via* the spirit substances (the Messiah). The Holy Ghost is this *indirect* presence of "God insofar as he is with the Messiah in creatures."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Gr, ii, 553-55.

<sup>73</sup> *Adumbratio*, chapter 3, sections 10-11.

<sup>74</sup> *On the Incarnation of God*, in A, 6, I, 533.

<sup>75</sup> *Principles*, p. 11.



## 7.2 On the Double-Aspected Nature of Monads and the *Adam Kadmon*

I have argued at some length that the spirit substances of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, collectively known as *Adam Kadmon*, have two ontological aspects, a feature which also pertains to Leibniz's monads. One aspect is the ideal one: this universe as (the infinity of) thoughts of one (divine) substance God: the kabbalistic realm of *Azilut*, and Leibniz's complete concepts. The other aspect is the substantial one: this universe as (the infinity of) active principles or individual substances separate from the divine one: the kabbalistic spirits of the realms of *Bri'ah*, *Yezirah* and *Assiyah*, and Leibniz's monads (minds, souls and bare entelechies).

I think there are no grounds for suggesting that Leibniz's thoughts in this area were fundamentally influenced by his involvement with Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. As early as 1688, in the theological writings related to the *Catholic Demonstrations*, Leibniz had written that "the ideas of God and the substances of things are the same", though they are "different in relation... as action and passion". These will eventually be termed monads, and are both ideas (of God, and in a passive relation to him) and substances (of creatures, and in an active relation to them). Thus "the substance of things is an idea. Idea is the union of God and creatures, so that the action of agent and patient is one." <sup>76</sup> One of the chapters for the planned project of the *Catholic Demonstrations* is entitled "The origin of the first human mind explained through a particle gathered of the divine aura". An accompanying note continues: "The origin of the first mind [is] from God, drawn out from the active power". <sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> L, pp. 118-19.

<sup>77</sup> A, 6, i, 496.

Creatures are comprised of both an active and a passive principle, or a soul and a body. But the soul also has a passive aspect to it, as a complete concept in the mind of God, now actualized. In *Double Infinité* of 1695 (?), the newly adopted term "monad" is described in its passive aspect as "a diminished divinity... [a] quasi-All... imitating God... similar to God". And its active aspect, as ruler over the infinity of subordinate monads in its body, is described as "a material universe eminently... [a] *quasi-Nothing*... imitated by the universe... similar to matter". <sup>78</sup> The double aspect is further referred to in a letter to de Volder of 1699:

The soul is not, for me, the idea of matter itself but the source of ideas for itself and in itself... An idea is, so to speak, something dead and unchangeable in itself, as is a figure; soul is rather something living and full of activity... But in another sense of the word, I could say that in some way the soul is a living or substantial idea, or more correctly, that it is an 'ideating' substance. <sup>79</sup>

It is noteworthy that the most explicit statement of the Janus and medial nature of monads in the *Double Infinité* essay, coincides with one of the very first usages of the new term. It could be that this essay, written as it was at the zenith of Leibniz's kabbalistic interests and involvements with van Helmont, represents a certain *clarification* in Leibniz's mind concerning the divine and creaturely aspects of the monad. In the *Seder Olam*, seemingly read by Leibniz shortly before he wrote *Double Infinité*, he was exposed to van Helmont's thoughts on this topic. <sup>80</sup> Van Helmont had written there about the world of *Azilut*, that ideal representation in the mind of God of the created spirits of the lower worlds. But Leibniz, while accepting that "if by the world of *Azilut* the author understands the intelligible world which is in God's

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<sup>78</sup> Gr, ii, 553-55.

<sup>79</sup> L, p. 520.

<sup>80</sup> Leibniz had read the *Seder Olam* by July 1694 (see chapter 1); and Grua dates *Double Infinité* as after 1695 (?) (see Gr, ii, 553).

thoughts, one could allow it", he criticizes what he perceives to be its medial nature as a third type of being, which is neither God nor creature: "It must not be said that it holds a middle nature between God and the creatures, since it belongs to God himself".<sup>81</sup> Yet, the spirit substances of the lower kabbalistic worlds, which have their ideal counterparts in *Azilot*, have a correspondence of the same kind in Leibniz's doctrines. Indeed, they had led him to write "that in some way the soul is a living or substantial idea... an 'ideating' substance". Spirit substances or monads belong *both* to God and to creature: they are "similar to God" and "similar to matter".

By 1696 Leibniz had read at least some of Conway's *Principles*. She writes there of Christ the *ens medium* between God and creatures, as he who has an aspect as "God... or the essential word of the father", and another as "the word which is uttered and revealed, the perfect and substantial image of God's word".<sup>82</sup> But if it is not certain that he read this in Conway, it was he who wrote in *De Homine*, probably in the same year 1696, and seemingly paraphrasing van Helmont in his own words, that "All things exist in [Christ], who is the greatest; and who is in every smallest thing". Christ, as the monad plenum extended without limit, contains all things; and as every unextended monad, he is "in every smallest thing". And every monad is *both* an active power in the creature, "is a centre or seed, which contains [the] power... from where... things proceed"; *and* is a passive thought of God's mind, "an image of angelic nature... In the angel there exists spiritually the seeds of all things... The angel is an absolute image of God". Furthermore, "The true theology consists in the meeting of Adam and of Christ, of ourselves and of God."<sup>83</sup> And in *Thoughts on Genesis* Leibniz wrote, also in the same year, that "*Aelohim* [the *ens medium*]... hath

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<sup>81</sup> OK, ii, 1053; LH, I, V, 2d, fols. 22-22r.

<sup>82</sup> *Principles*, p. 21.

<sup>83</sup> Sections 23, 24, 27; OK, ii, 1059-60; L Br, 67, fols 52-53.



relation to the ideas of things, and contains in himself, the treasure of virtues and powers, which by creation he brings forth in time".<sup>84</sup> And it was he also who wrote that

*Aelohim*, by his inward Speech, or efficacious Thought, sent forth Vertue from himself, into the Object; which, although, whilst it was yet with him, it were *Aelohim*; yet as soon as it was made his object, it began to have a particular or proper Being of its own.<sup>85</sup>

In the MS version of this last passage, Leibniz had referred to the pre-uttered object as "*in him*". That Leibniz changed this to "with him", which implies the co-existence with God of the objects of thought, rather than their identity with his being (the thoughts as predicates of God's being), suggests some uncertainty in his mind concerning the dual nature of *Aelohim*. That Leibniz may not have fully comprehended the Helmontian doctrine is a possible reason for his baffling remarks in an essay written six years after *Thoughts*, entitled *Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit*. Here, he outlines this doctrine as that which asserts there is only one spirit substance responsible for animating the world: that there is no plurality of particular spirits for particular parts of the world. He uses the analogy of the organ: that there is but one wind, as single causal agent for the particular sounds, as mere effects, produced when the wind passes through particular pipes, rather than each sound having its own particular causal wind. The doctrine is clearly pantheistic, reducing individual living beings to mere effects, and their souls to mere appearances. This, Leibniz says, is what the metaphysics of Spinoza and the Neo-Cartesians turns out to be. But it is puzzling why he goes on to say that of those who assert the doctrine of a universal spirit there are some who

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<sup>84</sup> p. 105.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

believe, like the Cabbalists, that God created it. [This] is also the opinion of the Englishman Henry More and other newer philosophers, particularly of certain chemists who believe that there is a universal *Archeus* or world-soul; some of them here maintained that this is the spirit of the Lord moving over the waters, of which the beginning of Genesis speaks.<sup>86</sup>

This latter is almost certainly a reference to the Helmontian doctrine as set out in *Thoughts on Genesis*. Leibniz is suggesting that this doctrine asserts that God created a world soul which moves upon the waters, and is the sole and universal animator of the creatures of the waters. In the notes for *Thoughts* taken down by Leibniz, van Helmont states that "the Spirit of Elohim was carried over the faces of the waters"; that "the spirit of Elohim... is carried, is kept moving, establishes and supervises action in the waters (not upon the faces or superficies, but by intimate penetration)".<sup>87</sup> If this "Spirit of *Aelohim*" were the only real spirit present in the world then Leibniz's claim that van Helmont's is a doctrine of a created single universal spirit would be comprehensible. But van Helmont *asserted* (rightly or wrongly) that a *multiplicity* of created substances existed. Leibniz himself wrote this up in *Thoughts*:

The things which were produced by Aelohim out of seeds, whereas before they were in Him, now subsist by themselves and are left to themselves, being endued with an active and spontaneous power.<sup>88</sup>

Is it the case that Leibniz conceives there to be a soul of the world in the Helmontian doctrine, which he terms a single created universal spirit? A soul of the world, as an ultimate ruling principle, or purely active spirit, to which all other spirits are mere

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<sup>86</sup> L, p. 555.

<sup>87</sup> LH, I, V, 2g, fol. 36: "Spiritus Elohim ferebatur super faciebus aquarum"; "Spiritus Elohim... ferebatur, motabat, stabat, actionem exercebat in aquas (non super faciebus seu superficie, sed penetrando intima)".

<sup>88</sup> *Thoughts on Genesis*, p. 12.

subordinates, is ruled out by van Helmont's assertion of the vital continuum: there can be no maximum sphere of rulership for the created world. Leibniz knew this for it was he who wrote in *Thoughts*, using van Helmont's notes, that:

Every part of the World hath its own Expansion, as well as something above the same, by which it is governed and assisted; yet is the whole Expansion altogether Infinite: And tho' there be a present limited Sphere to every Expansion, yet have they a power of stretching or spreading themselves more and more, without end.<sup>89</sup>

Is it the case that the multiple created substances which van Helmont asserts exist, are denied to do so by Leibniz (and are thus reduced to being mere effects) on account of a lack of demonstration in the Helmontian doctrine? In *Thoughts*, the Christian Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost is equated to *Jehova*, *Aelohim* and the Spirit of *Aelohim*. Leibniz wrote that "the ineffable name... *Jehovah*... signifies the principle or beginning of all essence, aeternal, immense, and unchangeable, primitive, which is subject to no time". *Aelohim* (*Adam Kadmon* in more kabbalistic terminology) is the Son, "the right hand of *Jehovah*, or he that sits at his right hand, that is, the first begotten". *Aelohim* has a dual nature. As the totality of all ideas of things, it is God's mind ("*Aelohim*... hath relation to the ideas of things"); as the totality of all substances of things, it is the created world ("*Aelohim*... contains in himself, the treasure of vertues and powers, which by creation he brings forth").<sup>90</sup> Creation, then, happened when "this world, being conceiv'd by *Aelohim*, was brought forth out of the Mystery of the eternal Vertues and Seeds of a former State".<sup>91</sup> And "creation, or the sowing of seeds, out of the spiritual world into the corporeal... belongs to

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 29.



*Aelohim*".<sup>92</sup> Creatures, or the "faces in the waters", are ideas empowered or actualized by the spirit of *Aelohim*, the Holy Ghost, or the will of God: "all the faces in the waters, or Spirits hid in the water, received their activity and virtue from the Spirit of *Aelohim*".<sup>93</sup> To the extent that the power or being that creatures have is a consequence of God's will, so his will, or the spirit of *Aelohim*, is immanent in each creature: "The Spirit of Light is from the Spirit of *Aelohim*, or a virtue begotten by Him in the things that are". Yet *no* creature is pure light, or unlimited power, "because otherwise the creatures would not be distinguished from God, or Jehovah, who is light without darkness".<sup>94</sup> God's transcendence to and immanence in creatures is summed up in the words: "the Universal, Supreme, and Eternal Spirit in *Aelohim*... determines Himself to certain creatures; whereas, in Himself, He is common to all, and indetermined".<sup>95</sup>

The Helmontian doctrine, then, certainly *wants* there to be multiple created substances; but is their existence satisfactorily determined? I have argued that the Helmontian cosmological schema is paralleled in Leibniz's own: of God's infinite eternal substance, his mind with its ideas of things, and his will which actualizes ideas into the substances of creatures separate to his own substance. I have also shown how it is that Leibniz holds that there can be sufficient reasons in the universe (for the existence of things) that are worthy of the name substance and which are separate from the divine one, rather than being mere effects of him as the ultimate sufficient reason. If this universe, in all its detail, was entirely deducible from the eternal truths as belonging to the primary substance, then all things would indeed be no more than the thoughts of God, and God's will would be without function. But that

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

this universe is *not* so deducible (an infinity of possible universes is logically entailed by God's thoughts) permits a role for God's will, as extramundane sufficient reason for this one universe, and provides a meaning for "creation" as the instantiation of mundane sufficient reasons for parts of the universe. But, the Helmontian doctrine, including its expression in *Thoughts on Genesis*, does not account for God's will (the spirit of *Aelohim*) in a way that could convince Leibniz that the substances it is supposed to create are anything other than (still) mere thoughts of God. Leibniz has left us a sign in *Thoughts* of his own dissatisfaction with the incompleteness of van Helmont's doctrine. After mentioning how this (corporeal) world of self-subsisting things is produced out of the ideal world in *Elohim*, the concept of the alternative universe half raises its head:

But whether or no *Aelohim* produced any other worlds, the brothers of this, which were not involved in Adam's fall, is a matter of more profound inquiry, and the determination of it is foreign to the business before me.<sup>96</sup>

Out of loyalty to van Helmont, Leibniz does not determine this issue here; but in 1706-10 (?) the reason for his dissatisfaction is made explicit, when he criticizes Wachter's thesis, *Elucidarius cabalisticus*, that the cosmologies of Spinoza and the Kabbalah did, after all, include individual created substances that were separate from the divine one. As Leibniz himself notes of the thesis, Wachter "defends the Cabbala of the Hebrews and Spinoza; and shows that they distinguish God and the world". But at the outset of his remarks, Leibniz writes that "on this point he is not very satisfactory. For, according to [Spinoza and the kabbalists], God is effectively a substance, and the creature is effectively the accident of God".<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>97</sup> B, pp. 1-2.

In the fourth chapter of his thesis, Wachter makes numerous quotations from Spinoza with the aim of showing how the philosopher's cosmology agrees with that of Kabbalah. The bulk of Leibniz's remarks concern this chapter; but he is less interested in whether or not Spinoza and the kabbalists agree, but concerns himself with analysing Wachter's claims, wherever he makes them, that these cosmologies actually do distinguish God from the world.

Wachter had quoted proposition 17 of part 1 of *The Ethics*, and Leibniz paraphrases it thus:

For my part, I [Spinoza] think I have shewn clearly enough, that all things follow from the supreme power of God, by the same necessity, just as it follows from the nature of a triangle, that its three angles are equal to two right angles.<sup>98</sup>

But to Leibniz's thinking, if all the things of the universe are deducible from the eternal truths as they exist in God's mind, as predicates of his substance, then the things of the universe remain mere thoughts of God. And since these things follow by absolute necessity there can be no function left for God's will to perform, and the term creation ceases to have any useful meaning. This would be the case if God and the world were as Spinoza's philosophy would have them. However, Leibniz says

that things follow from God, as properties from a triangle, is proved by no argument, nor is there an analogy between essences and existing things.<sup>99</sup>

Remarking on Wachter's quotation of the scholium to proposition 10 of part 2 of *The Ethics*, Leibniz advances his metaphysical distinction of the necessary and

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<sup>98</sup> B, p. 10.

<sup>99</sup> B, p. 10.



contingent:

The axiom: that belongs to the essence of a thing, without which it cannot exist nor be conceived, should be applied to necessary things or species, not to individuals nor contingents... Hence they [individual contingent worldly things] have no necessary connection with God.<sup>100</sup>

It is because "things are possible in many ways",<sup>101</sup> and that the sufficient reasons for the things of this particular universe are not necessary but contingent, that is, are not deducible from, are not grounded in, the eternal truths in God's mind, that they are sufficient reasons for the *parts* of the world, i.e. are substances in their own right: are vital principles and not mere thoughts of God.

Wachter quotes Spinoza's scholium to proposition 13 of part 2 of *The Ethics*, and Leibniz paraphrases this as "All things have souls, though in different degrees, rests on another singular opinion, that an *idea* of everything is given of necessity in God, of which, God is the cause". Leibniz consequently criticizes this for its apparent failure to add anything more to a soul than its being a mere idea in God's mind:

There is not the slightest reason for supposing that the soul is an idea. Ideas are something merely abstract, as numbers and figures, and cannot act... The soul is not an idea, but the source of innumerable ideas. For it has besides the present idea, a certain activity or production of new ideas.<sup>102</sup>

That substances exist separate from the divine one, gives a meaning to the notion of "creation". Creation is the underwriting of why this particular universe of substances exists, rather than the many other possible ones, by the extramundane sufficient reason of God's will, grounded in his essence of omnibenevolence, which, since this

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<sup>100</sup> B, pp. 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> B, p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> B, p. 9.

is grounded not in the eternal truths, and therefore not logically determined, not imposed on God, is why Leibniz says God's will is free. And so, in reply to Spinoza that "God is, by the same necessity, the cause of himself and the cause of all things", and that "the power of things is the power of God", Leibniz says:

I do not admit [this]. God exists necessarily, but he produces things freely, and the power of things is produced by God, but is different from the divine power, and things work themselves, although they received their powers of acting.<sup>103</sup>

To return to my question whether it is the case that Leibniz states that the Helmontian doctrine is that of a single universal spirit because it is not explained how substances separate from the divine one are possible, I think the answer is yes on this point.

Without the distinction of the necessary and the contingent, there can be no *Adam Kadmon/Aelohim*, as that immediate production of substances out of which creatures are formed, and which is the mundane aspect of the ideal representation of things as it exists in the mind of God.

There are two important conclusions to be drawn from all this. Firstly, it is now clear that with the single exception of the distinction of the necessary and contingent, there is no significant difference between the cosmology of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah and that of Leibniz. And this impinges on my second conclusion, that the blithe and unhelpful way in which Leibniz states the Helmontian doctrine to be that of a single universal spirit, without bothering to explain why this was so, when the latter at least wanted separate substances to exist, appears to be the result of a need by Leibniz to distance himself from "kabbalistic" philosophies. For it is not the case that

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<sup>103</sup> B, p. 8.

he was confused about van Helmont's cosmology by the time he came to write the *Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit* in 1702.



## Conclusion

In Part 2 of this thesis the cosmological doctrines of Leibniz and Christian Lurianic Kabbalah have been compared in detail. This has shown the existence of many fundamental similarities between their conceptions of space and matter; time and motion; the nature of soul and body, and their relationship; the continuum; creation; and the relationship between God, the cosmos and the individual created being. The exposition offered here has shown how Leibniz's thought in each of these areas is derivable from his epistemological and metaphysical principles: principles which had been established in his philosophy from at least the late 1660s. In addition, references have been made to specific assertions by Leibniz on these cosmological themes in the years prior to the mid-1690s, the time of his first significant contact with Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. All this strongly suggests that the similarities highlighted should not be taken as evidence of a conceptual influence on Leibniz by Christian Lurianic Kabbalah.

Evidence has been presented to show that Leibniz's ideas on some issues may have been clarified as a result of his kabbalistic encounters. This appears to have been the case for Leibniz's considerations on the transformation of the same animal, on his categorizing of monads, and on the nature of monads as being both divine and mundane at the same time (their double-aspected nature). For each of these developments it has been shown that they follow from principles already latent in the Leibnizian metaphysic: hence I refer to them as *clarifications* by kabbalism, as opposed to the sort of conceptual influence in which a new principle becomes adopted.

It is, therefore, to be concluded that the detailed similarities that have been highlighted here are essentially instances of intellectual convergence. I have mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 1 the broadly neo-Platonic influences on Leibniz and the Kabbalah. It is from this source that the base of cosmological principles common to Leibniz and Christian Lurianic Kabbalah had its origin.

In addition to isolating common principles, Part 2 of this thesis has also identified metaphors for these principles as they were utilized in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. Drawing on established kabbalistic, Hermetic and alchemical nomenclature and imagery, we have seen, for example, the soul, as active principle, described as fire, heat, light, Sun, and the body, as passive principle, as water, cold, dark, Moon; the passive pole of the continuum has been described as an abyss full of faces, or a slime of worms; and the cosmogonical process was described using the highly elaborate symbolism of Lurianic Kabbalah. Evidence has been put forward to show that Leibniz himself, on occasions, made some use of these metaphors, especially in essays written soon after the mid-1690s. However, the cosmological imagery of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah was never anything more than mere metaphor for Leibniz. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 3, Leibniz did not believe that Lurianic Kabbalah was a body of truths of the *Prisca Theologia* sort: this was not what had intrigued him to read the works of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah. Leibniz was interested to see whether, behind the metaphorical words of these exoteric writings, there was a set of principles that could be validated by, and correlated to, his own rational metaphysics. In Part 2 the cosmological principles of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah have been successfully paralleled to the Leibnizian doctrine by virtue of relating their underlying principles.

The particular investigation that Leibniz made of Christian Lurianic Kabbalah fell under the greater *raison d'être* for his doing philosophy: namely, to try to forge links wherever possible between all the world's various exoteric religious writings: to rid the world of religious and social conflict and thus to make it a better place.

But in Christian Lurianic Kabbalah Leibniz found not only a particular exercise in religious harmonizing, but a project which, itself, was strongly motivated to the same end. When Leibniz collaborated with van Helmont on *Thoughts on Genesis*, he was able to assist the latter in his analytic reduction of the words of Genesis to his own Hermetic, relatively rational, doctrine. This process of rationalizing the exoteric was one which Leibniz himself was already engaged in. Furthermore, in this collaborative work, Leibniz was able to "add many of my own thoughts" on account of the proximity that his thought had with that which underlay Christian Lurianic Kabbalah.

Finally, in addition to the points made above regarding the relationship between Leibniz and Christian Lurianic Kabbalah, Part 2 has highlighted aspects of Leibniz's cosmology not much dealt with in the literature, including Leibniz's own writings. I have argued that Leibniz's principles of the transformation of the same animal inevitably implies the revolution of souls from gross body to gross body; that, on account of his assertion of the continuum, there is no reason to deny that human minds could have evolved out of sub-human souls; and it has been argued that the precise status of monads must be a dual one: as simultaneously divine and mundane. Regarding the first two of these points, it has been noted that Leibniz either obfuscated or said little about these rationally-implied conclusions because of their theological unorthodoxy. And this epitomises the wider context of the history of philosophy within which the work of this thesis is located: the extent to which reason or faith should predominate in providing answers to fundamental philosophical



problems, such as the ultimate nature and origin of the universe, and man's place within it.

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